M. C. Flaherty

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SPECIMENS
OF
MODERN ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM

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SPECIMENS

OF

MODERN ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM

CHOSEN AND EDITED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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PREFACE

This book belongs to the realm of rhetoric rather than that of literature or literary history. It aims to use critical writing, more completely than is done in any existing text-book of selections, as an agent in rhetorical study and intellectual discipline. Books of specimens of the so-called forms of discourse, narration, description, exposition, and argumentation, are abundant, as well as useful. The present volume is less a complete illustration of a form of discourse than an analysis of a fair variety of pieces that would commonly be called literary criticism, but it is hoped that it also will be useful — at least to those moderately advanced students for whom it is intended.

The point of view in the editing of these selections is one from which literary criticism is regarded, rhetorically, largely as a form of exposition and argumentation, and, as a matter of fact, as a body of more or less particular theses and opinions. Selections, therefore, are given without abridgment, and the important points all along brought out relate to the dicta of each critic and his reasons for holding his opinions. The safest way to begin the study of literary criticism and the surest progress toward a sound knowledge of that art is, in my opinion, to be found in the examination of actual critical production. It is certainly wholesome to treat works of criticism like any other body of facts, as well as an illustration of some theory or other of the universe. Supplying material for analysis and some direction for study is, therefore, as far as this book attempts to go.

In arrangement, the essays proceed from the simplest, most matter of fact, and most easily demonstrable, to the more general, more abstract, and less easily provable. The arrangement is as follows: the first eight essays deal with particular men; numbers 9 and 10 have to do with special topics; and the last five are illustrative of general discussions — from highly different points of view — of literary art and morality. For any of the essays here an infinite variety of substitution and supplementation may, of course, be made, according to the preference of the teacher. I have chiefly tried to get as large a variety as possible within the limits of literary criticism, to avoid repetition of type, to present well-contrasted views and methods, and to avoid essays of too difficult a character. These reasons will

account for the omission of most earlier modern critics except Dryden and Johnson, and that of such later modern critics as Hazlitt, De Quincey, Carlyle, and Lowell. The introduction is a definition of criticism, and it contains also suggestions for the study of the form as a matter both of intelligent reading and of training in composition. The notes and questions are analytical rather than explanatory of the text; bracketed footnotes in the shape of translations of phrases not clear from the context are the only additions that I have made to the body of the book. I have also added a list of the books that I have cited in the course of the introduction and the notes, and an index of names and of topics. Any one who wishes to pursue the subject of criticism more exhaustively is, of course, referred to Professor Gayley and Professor Scott's invaluable bibliographies in their *Introduction to the Materials and Methods of Literary Criticism.*

If the view held in the following introduction be correct, that literary criticism is a *corpus* of opinion about literature deriving its ultimate sanction from personality and the general and lasting acceptation of its dicta — it would follow that any collection of good critical essays would form a suitable and desirable subject for rhetorical study. Such valuable collections as Professor Saintsbury's *Loci Critici,* Mr. Vaughan's *English Literary Criticism,* and Mr. Payne's *American Literary Criticism,* despite a trifling emphasis on national rather than critical issues, are well fitted for such analytical study as I have here indicated, and I have profited greatly by them. With them, however, the historical point of view, the desire to show criticism as something of a growth, complicates the question, and this, in my opinion, serves to darken the counsel that is of prime importance for students at the outset of the study of literary criticism. Soundly and surely to trace the real history of any body of literary opinion is a delicate and complicated task, too hard, unquestionably, for most college students. What is of fundamental importance, I repeat, is for the student first to understand what the critic is saying and then to discern the sanction for the faith that is in him. These questions, at the outset, are best kept clear of theories about development and generalizations about the history of the art. The present book may be termed, in short, an introduction to the study and practice of literary criticism.

W. T. B.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY,
July 12, 1907.

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INTRODUCTION

I

THE once common and popular notion that criticism is fault-finding, more or less direct and pointed, more or less elaborate, is so far passing out of use that it may be dismissed with a word. A less easily disposed of matter remains. It confronts alike the serious student and the trustful seeker for authority. No one who has read treatises on art and literature or essays and reviews of authors and plays and books from the hand of eminent masters of the theory and practice of criticism, can fail to be struck with the fact that critics, like other doctors, frequently disagree in their judgments. The result is confusing. A prospective theatre-goer, for example, sees in reviews of the first night very divergent opinions about a particular play, and he may "shudder, and know not how to think" — or where to go. Or a modest seeker for finality, disdaining all forms of criticism that, like the foregoing example, hold a taint of commercialism, and seeking the repose of certitude in the words of high-minded masters of the critical essay and the acknowledged arbiters of literary taste, will be struck by the fact that whereas Arnold,[1] for example, assigns to Byron a place second only to Wordsworth, among the poets of the last century, Mr. Swinburne[2] regards Byron as no more than low second rate and wholly inferior to Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and others. Who shall guard the guardians of literature?

To make clearer the fact of this discrepancy a few pregnant remarks as to the nature, the function, and the value of criticism may be quoted. "Criticism," says Mr. Collins,[3] "is to literature what legislation and government are to states. If they are in able and

[1] *Essays in Criticism*, Second Series. Wordsworth.
[2] *Miscellanies*. Wordsworth and Byron.
[3] *Ephemera Critica* p. 26.

honest hands, all goes well; if they are in weak and dishonest hands, all is anarchy and mischief." Arnold, in a frequently quoted passage, says,[1] "I am bound by my own definition of criticism: a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." Pater's theory is summed up in these words,[2] "What is important, then, is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects." Mr. Robertson's method is somewhat more argumentative:[3] "It is the getting behind spontaneous judgment, the ascertaining of how and why we differ in our judgments, that the critics so-called have left mostly unattempted." All these men, though at odds over method, evidently regard criticism as a high function. On the other hand, listen to Mr. Howells,[4] "Every literary movement has been violently opposed at the start, and yet never stayed in the least, or arrested, by criticism: every author has been condemned for his virtues, but in nowise changed by it." And again,[5] "Criticism has condemned whatever was, from time to time, fresh and vital in literature; it has always fought the new good thing in behalf of the old good thing; it has invariably fostered the tame, the trite, the negative that survived." Leslie Stephen, out of sorts with his life-long profession, wrote to Mr. Thomas Hardy (May 16, 1876):[6] "My remark about modern lectures was, of course, 'wrote sarcastic,' as Artemus Ward says, and intended for a passing dig in the ribs of some modern critics, who think that they can lay down laws in art like the Pope in religion, *e.g.*, the whole Rossetti-Swinburne school. But if you mean seriously to ask me what critical books I recommend, I can only say that I recommend none. I think that as a critic the less authors read of criticism, the better. You, *e.g.*, have a perfectly fresh and original view, and I think that the less you bother yourself about critical canons, the less chance there is of your becoming self-conscious and cramped. I should, indeed, advise the great writers — Shakespeare, Goethe, Scott, etc., etc., who give ideas and don't prescribe rules. Sainte-Beuve and Mat. Arnold (in a smaller way) are the only modern critics who seem to me worth reading — perhaps, too, Lowell. We are generally a poor lot, horribly afraid of not being in the

[1] *Essays in Criticism*, p. 38.
[2] *The Renaissance*, p. xii.
[3] *New Essays towards a Critical Method*, p. 4.
[4] *Criticism and Fiction*, p. 39.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[6] F. W. Maitland, *Life of Leslie Stephen*, p. 290.

fashion, and disposed to give ourselves airs on very small grounds." Stephen's father was even more contemptuous. Writing to John Venn (August 25, 1838), he said:[1] "Reviewing is an employment which I have never held in great esteem. It is generally a self-sufficient, insolent, superficial, and unedifying style of writing, and I fully persuaded myself that I should never be enlisted among the craft." The most scornful opinion is that of one of the "Rossetti-Swinburne school," William Morris:[2] "To think of a beggar making a living by selling his opinion about other people! And fancy any one paying him for it!"

In short, criticism is one thing to Arnold and quite another thing to Mr. Howells and Morris, and their views are perhaps no more opposite than those of Pater and Mr. Robertson. What to Arnold is noble and elevating, at least ideally, is to Mr. Howells, in practice at least, impotent, and to Morris an affair of commercial convenience. Whereas Pater holds faith in the sensitive individual judgment, Mr. Robertson deems such judgments merely data for further analysis. In the face of so great a divergence of opinion as to the function and the potency of criticism it is well to inquire what such views have in common and how criticism may be defined.

II

The most obvious answer to the foregoing query is that each of these writers is expressing what is for him a reality, or truth, or fact, with regard to the theory of criticism or, in its application, to a particular author or book. Furthermore, for every one of the opinions quoted above there is abundant historical evidence, and it remains true that criticism should be "disinterested," that it should be "in able and honest hands," that it should "endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world," that "the critic should possess . . . a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects," that it should "get behind spontaneous judgment," that it is as a whole impotent in the presence of genius, and that many critics are merely commercial.

All this means that criticism is, in the first instance, merely the

[1] Maitland, *Life of Leslie Stephen*, p. 14.

[2] J. W. Mackail, *The Life and Letters of William Morris*, Vol. I, p. 134.

expression of opinion about authors, books, and theories of art generally. The opinion is usually expressed dogmatically; that is, it is expressed as if it were a fact, a reality. It is a reality in so far as it has existence in the mind of the critic who utters it; it is a fact of what has been happily called the "existential" sort.[1] In this sense, any chance saying about an author or a book is criticism: it states a fact, a reality, a truth present in the mind of the speaker. That opinion may be modified by further reading and by the clash of opinion with opinion, but the resulting judgment, if sincerely held, will be true, as an "existential" fact. This primary conception of criticism as an expression of personal opinion is admirably phrased by Professor Saintsbury in his *History of Criticism*, when, speaking of the object of his work, he says, "In the following pages it is proposed to set forth . . . what Plato, Aristotle, Dionysius, Longinus, what Cicero and Quinctilian, what Dante and Dryden, what Corneille and Coleridge, with many a lesser man besides, have said about literature."[2] These words supply a handy definition of literary criticism; it is talk about the things of literature, haply with a view to stating what seems to the critic to be true. This definition is, of course, very vague; it does not distinguish good criticism from bad criticism, except in respect to sincerity. One must, therefore, inquire further into the matter.

Before taking up that task one or two general observations may be made by way of clearing the ground. The most evident cause for the discrepancies noted in the foregoing paragraphs lies in the diversity of the human temperament. No two men will be struck by precisely the same thing, by the same body of facts, in precisely the same way. Just as no two critics write about the same set of objects or authors, so no two critics would hold identical views with regard to a book that they happen to be treating in common. The principle is a very obvious one, but it is so often lost sight of that it seems necessary to exploit it once more; for people are prone to cling to the word of distinguished critics and catchpenny reviewers as if it contained final, universal, and unexpugnable truth. Such things the opinion of any critic does not and never can contain; indeed the moment a *dictum* becomes a dogma, the moment an opinion, though uttered with, is found really to contain, finality, it ceases to be interesting; for the history of literary criticism shows

[1] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 4.
[2] Vol. I, p. 5.

that method of human expression to have thriven on variousness of belief.

Since, then, no two men's interests or ideas of value are just the same, it is a good practice in studying critics, to see on what ideas they lay stress. It is always the proper method of procedure in observing people to note what things they love, hate, fear, and cherish. It will be seen that the opinions heretofore quoted have body and existence as reality of different sorts: some concern themselves with what is loosely called impression, as with Pater; others, like those of Arnold, relate to moral value and significance; for Mr. Howells good criticism is, by implication, that which lends the helping hand to the next generation of writers; bad, that which is practically impotent.

Another very obvious reason for the discrepancy under discussion lies in the pleasing vagueness of some of the major terms; vagueness is often a source of disagreement as well as of peace. What, for example, are "beautiful objects"? What is "the best that is known and thought in the world"? What, so to speak, are the finger-marks of the "able and honest hand"? What is the "spontaneous judgment" and by what subtle by-path may one "get behind it"? Over such questions much discussion naturally arises. Mr. Chesterton[1] would undoubtedly say that they are part and parcel of the common sense, and are therefore understood by everybody, without thinking. They are like our own names, which seem the most familiar and appropriate things in the world — until we begin repeating them and revolving them in our minds, when they lose all semblance of rime and reason. The moment one begins to ponder these terms they become vague. It is the task of each critic to illustrate his conception of these terms by his essays: but the fact remains that no two critics would agree in their illustrations of the general idea or in their special examples of beauty and the best.

For these and other reasons too numerous to mention a deal of disagreement and conflict is the by-product of literary opinion. We are all, let us repeat, literary critics whenever we express an opinion about general or specific literary things. Some of us are ready and proud to abide by our opinion in the face of the whole world, nay, even more, are eager to air our differences; others are keen to cover ourselves with the cloak of authority and to take

[1] As in *Heretics*.

refuge in an *ex cathedra* personality. A study of the origins of criticism would be very interesting, but this is not the place for so pregnant a piece of illustration. Suffice it to say that there has in all probability been in criticism, as in all human affairs, a conflict between liberty and authority.[1] The timid must always have sought refuge in the dicta of some more expressive and powerful personality; others, more independent, have been the iconoclasts and heretics of literary opinion, have claimed the right to say plainly what they felt. In the nature of things, a body of opinion about literary matters would arise, this tradition would be perpetuated by men who found in that a profitable way to gain their livelihood or who had real zeal for the cause, and in time the class of professional critic would emerge from chaos — of the tribe held in disesteem by the author of *The Earthly Paradise.*

Aside from this tradition, best expressed in such a phrase as the history of taste, there have been many attempts, from before the days of Aristotle down, to rationalize the whole matter, to show what laws, what principles, what common human motive, underlie our critical ideas and are the sanction for authority. Not only have rules been given "for not writing and judging ill," but the problem of the fundamental law which shall enable us to know the truth has been, somewhat unsuccessfully, the object of search to many philosophical critics.[2] Abandoning as futile for our present purposes, though interesting, any effort to theorize along that line, let us turn to criticism as a body of specific actual fact, and illustrating the matter by a pretty wide variety of specimens from well-known English criticism of high quality, let us see what, in general, criticism means, what are the sanctions of critical opinion, what objective reality means in criticism, and what are some of the categories actually employed in this pleasing science.

III

Criticism is both a matter of process and a matter of form. As to the first of these, if the foregoing analysis be sound, criticism may be said, broadly, to aim at establishing fact; it is a method of demonstration. Viewed in this light, criticism may be applied

[1] For an able statement of the essence and merits of this conflict, see W. P. Trent, *The Authority of Criticism.*

[2] See, for example, C. T. Winchester, *Some Principles of Literary Criticism,* and W. J. Courthorpe, *Life in Poetry, Law in Taste.*

to any branch of human thought or activity; any idea or process may be subject to it; one may criticise the latest findings of astronomy or the making of armor-plate and automobiles, may criticise oatmeal as a food or Ossian as an oasis in an alleged age of prose. The object of the process is to approximate some reality underlying these institutions. Truth, that is what criticism is seeking. Criticism, then, like truth, may be classified according to the material with which it deals. Literary criticism is one of these classes; it enjoys the distinction of being at once the most conspicuous entity among the various branches of criticism and the most inaccurate and indefinite in the application of its tests. Literary criticism stumbles at the starting line in its attempt to define literature, and its tests are evidently not so precise as may be applied in a matter of natural or chemical science. For some expounders of literature will have it that the ideas are the main thing, others, that the expression of personality is what counts, still others, that one must seize the "inner" meaning and the spiritual significance. In the main, however, literary criticism, like other forms of criticism, seeks (1) to establish the facts of literature and (2) to pass judgment on the value and significance of those facts. Since passing judgment on the worth or value of a fact or body of facts is really nothing but establishing another fact, though in a different category, the aim of literary criticism may be defined as, broadly, that which we stated at the beginning of this paragraph — the establishing of facts, of whatever sort, so they be facts — that is, truths, realities — about literature. Like any intellectual process, literary criticism may therefore be defined by (1) the material with which it deals and (2) the methods which it used to establish its conclusions, the cogency of which varies greatly with the material.

Under the head of material, a large number of classes may be recognized and commonly are recognized. Textual criticism, for example, aims to establish the correctness of the text of an author; it employs, very usefully, much human energy. Biographical criticism tries to establish the facts of the life of an author and to show how they are related to his writing; Stephen's account of Swift's work in behalf of Ireland in this volume is an illustration of this sort of essay, and it shows the relation of criticism to biography. Akin to this are facts of personality, of temperament and the like. Facts of vogue are a source of material not to be neglected; indeed, these facts, like those of the life of the

author, may almost be said to be the starting point for any good criticism whatsoever. Facts of vogue, of contemporary opinion, of what people have said, are, of course, the basis of all good historical criticism. In passing, however, it may be said that what has been called the "collective" estimate of books and authors receives, on the whole, too little attention from critics. Critics usually prefer theorizing and airing their own views to looking up the facts. It is one of Coleridge's claims to distinction as a critic that he makes the vogue of Wordsworth the starting point for his account, though he quickly becomes transcendental. Mr. Robertson's critique of Poe is largely an analysis of the collective estimate of Poe, with comments of his own. It is one of the best specimens of that type that we have. An even more matter of fact example is in Mr. Sidney Lee's *Life of William Shakespeare*, a chapter (20) entitled *Shakespeare's Posthumous Reputation.* Questions of influence, when treated as matters of fact, and other such topics come under this head. But one who looks into the matter will be amazed to see how little critical writing, comparatively, there is of this sort. Careful literary historians are usually much more concerned with their own views and those of their fellow-critics than with strictly contemporary opinion. Even modern critics, dealing with modern authors, go into the rationale, the æsthetics, the personality, or what not, to the exclusion of this important source of material.[1] This is a field in which an enormous amount of literary work remains to be done.

Facts relating to the class or type of writer to which an author belongs are another well-recognized kind of material. Johnson's exposition of the metaphysical poets is an example of this interest. Many of the great classes or types have become more or less set, and we have the commonly accepted categories of epic, dramatic,

[1] See, for example, Mr. A. C. Benson's *Life of Pater* in the *English Men of Letters* series. Mr. Benson devotes much time to summarizing Pater's works (a totally unnecessary thing for one who has read them and not very inspiriting for one who has not) and much time to comment on Pater's style, personality, etc. Perhaps Mr. Benson did not mean to give us more, and his attitude is surely worshipful and decorous, but one would welcome a word about Pater's actual influence. In contrast are to be named Professor Lounsbury's studies in the vogue of Shakespeare (*Shakesperian Wars*). A conscientious endeavour to state a method which shall account for all possible sources and hence be a "collective" criticism is to be found in E. Hennequin's *La Critique Scientifique.* This is summarized by Mr. Robertson in *New Essays towards a Critical Method* (*The Theory and Practice of Criticism*).

elegiac, lyric poetry, etc., and, in prose, such things as the essay and the novel. It is the aim of much modern criticism to study these types, and criticism characteristically goes beyond mere study of the form and tries to ascertain the further fact of the comparative value of each class, with a view to confining judicial comment to intra-, rather than inter-, class comparisons. Why attempt to compare a lyric and a novel? They are in different media and are not susceptible of real comparison except as representatives of alleged higher and lower classes. Facts of treatment, of method, of art, of form, occupy a very conspicuous place in the history of criticism Modern rhetorical study, for example, is merely a practical application of some of the critical results obtained in the study of this medium. Of the essays in this volume those of Poe, Mr. Harrison, and Mr. Robertson will be found to contain material of this sort.

An exceedingly prolific source of actual critical commentary lies in the interpretation of an author's meaning. The love of literary interpretation seems to be deep seated in the human heart; the hidden meaning, the underlying mystery, is always a charming thing to conjure with, and it offers possibilities of interest and further mystification that no accurate scientific study can ever hope to equal. "Whole rivulets of ink," as Swift would say, have been expended in the yet unsettled question of what Shakespeare meant *Hamlet* to mean; and an equally prolific study could be made of the different interpretations that have been put on Dante's *Divina Commedia.* Lowell's essay on Dante,[1] for example, is mainly one of interpretation, designed to convey to the then somewhat untutored American audience a proper conception of Dante's meaning and to correct some of the mistakes of interpretation of a preceding volume by Maria Francesca Rossetti.[2] A good example of not too solemn interpretation is Mr. Bernard Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite,* and it is a good subject for study in that the author gives evidence of an apparently definite sort for his interpretations. In general, the literary interpreter, like the critic who neglects the collective view, does not much trouble himself with a historical aspect of the subject, but reads his own meanings into it. Browning, perhaps, more than any modern Englishman has been the prey of interpreters, scientific, philosophical, theosophical, neoplatonic, symbolistic. The truth of the matter is that interpreta-

[1] *Prose Works*, Vol. IV.

[2] *A Shadow of Dante.*

tion is much more a matter of creation than of argumentative science, and hence it is one of the most winning forms that the critical process can follow.

Akin to interpretation is much of the criticism that seeks its material in moral values and in significance. It is, of course, about this attitude that the fierce discussions of art for art's sake have arisen. To some critics a writer like Poe is insignificant and meretricious because he did not in the least care to inculcate a moral and "significant" view of the universe, but preferred to work as skilfully from any premises that he chose to assume to a perfect conclusion from those premises. The comparative admiration that the French have for Poe, the scorn which those of us who are more used to Emerson and Hawthorne feel for him, is both an illustration and a proof of the fact that such differences of opinion are temperamental and racial rather than demonstrable and rational. Arnold, of the writers in this volume, most sternly held to the moral view of literature; Poe to the artistic. Shelley, of course, is a critic who attempts to ground the morality of his position in the innate yearning of humanity for the ideal.

There are other sources of material, but the matter need be no further illustrated. Besides the material and the point of view from which it is approached, there are naturally a great many questions connected with the personality, the predilection, and the training of the critic. These all modify the result, so that, as a matter of fact, of the categories of material named above, not one can be found, actually, to exist in a pure state. A critic presumably writes what he feels, what he deems it good for people to know, and does not think of the categories. The combination of the elements just spoken of — the material, the personality, the point of view, the animus, the training, etc., of the critic — result, for purposes of convenience, in several classes or types of criticism. They should be called tendencies rather than types, since the line of separation between any two classes cannot be surely drawn. Though the classifications are not very satisfactory, some of the main types may be briefly indicated.

The primary, the most elementary, and by all means the safest, is impressionism. It is elementary because it is concerned merely with what the critic happens to think at the moment, and because the critic's reaction, though often expressed with much charm, is never other than a variably personal one. It is safe, for a critic may always take refuge in the phrase which there is no gainsaying,

"So it seems to me," and may, if he be impolite and a Capulet, bite his thumb at other critics. It is not wholly a matter of regret that from the writings of an impressionistic critic it usually is impossible to make out a consistent theory of the universe or of criticism. A case in point is the brilliant contemporary English critic, Mr. Chesterton, who seems occasionally to contradict his premises in his conclusions or in succeeding premises. To differ, eternally to differ, from previous opinion, to have intuitions and to express them with a vigorous air of finality, is the one principle that lends coherence and form to his stimulating and often admirable suggestions. Probably M. Jules Lemaitre, the distinguished French critic, is the classic exponent of this type of criticism. In this volume Lamb is perhaps the best example.

The type has many opposites. The one nearest to it is probably the so-called "interpretative" or "appreciative" frame of mind. As these names imply, criticism of this sort strives to throw light on the real meaning or character of the author or to weigh and measure him at his just value. Like any criticism, it may deal with different kinds of material — personality, work, style, etc. — but its essence is an attempt justly to appreciate the subject, to weigh it at its proper worth. It is the opposite of the impressionistic type in that it aims to take into consideration the author and his work from his point of view and not merely from that of the personal reaction of the critic. Pater is perhaps the most systematic exponent of the appreciative tendency in English literature, but such critics as Bagehot, Arnold, and Coleridge often deal with appreciative categories.

An opposite of both of these is the so-called judicial type, now happily, in its extreme forms, tending to pass out of existence. Characteristically it consists in setting up or strongly implying a standard — philosophical, political, religious, commercial, sociological, or what not — and rating literature by it. Alleged "canons of criticism" derived from the practice of "Tully, Lord Kames, and other elegant writers," are examples of a fashion that has been persistent since the days of Aristotle. All criticism, in some way, implies a standard, but in criticism of the judicial type, the standard is found, not in the critic's likes and dislikes, as with impressionism, nor in the author's own purpose, as in appreciation, but in something external to both. The best example of judicial criticism that we have, alike of its manner and of its final impotence, is to be found in the work of Francis Jeffrey, whose stand-

ards, derived from the canons of the eighteenth century and the Whiggism of the time, proved inadequate to cope with the outburst of imaginative literature at the opening of the nineteenth century.[1] It is critics of this type whom Mr. Howells has in mind, and their name is legion. Every critic in this volume is to some degree an example of it. Most conspicuous is Arnold, whose standard is a literary-moral one. The æsthetic critic who, like Hazlitt or Mr. Harrison, showers adjectives of characterization upon us, may belong to this class. Or he may be an impressionist or an appreciator.

There is also a type known as the scientific, the opposite of all those that have preceded, but most strikingly opposed to impressionism. This operates by collecting, comparing, and weighing of all possible data, with a view to arriving at a stricter and less personal and prejudiced view of the subject than the other methods furnish. The tests are argumentative, but there can never be hope of reaching so accurate results as are obtained in more strictly scientific work. Good inductive criticism of literature is scarce. The data are too complicated, the personal equation too much in the way, to make possible any fixed result. Mr. Robertson's valuable work is a good instance of this type, and the essay on Poe is, in his own opinion, the best example of his method. To a certain degree, of course, writers like Bagehot are "scientific" in that they expound facts which in a large measure are not open to question.

A distinction frequently drawn is that between destructive and constructive criticism. Destructive criticism is, as its name implies, that which aims to overthrow what has been regarded as established and accepted, a theory, a set of ideas, a fair reputation, without any palpable substitution. Macaulay's essay on Montgomery does this and does it very effectively, much more so than the destructive criticism of Jeffrey, whose work, as a matter of historical fact, in the long run failed of its purpose. What gives destructive criticism its effect is an interesting problem for study; it will probably be found to reside, like most of the sanctions for critical opinion, in the consensus of opinion — of which more later on. Destructive criticism will be found usually on the side of conservatism, and, like satire, it gains its force from being substantially in accord with some sort of prevailing sentiment. Much

[1] See L. E. Gates, *Selections from the Essays of Francis Jeffrey*, Introduction.

destructive criticism is, of course, of an iconoclastic kind; a good example of vigorous attacks on reputations of great currency will be found in Mr. Robertson's *Modern Humanists*. As to constructive criticism, it aims to establish new ideas and principles, to ascertain what may underlie the obvious and the ordinary that is really of more importance, and it aims to infer the unknown from the known. To its inductions and generalizations we owe whatever literary principles we have.

As has been said these types are merely tendencies, and others may be recognized. Viewed with regard to any group of contemporary authors they do not seem, unless the critics are openly hostile to each other, to amount to much. It is when one overlooks the whole field of criticism that they assume larger proportions and stand for different fashions and different vogues.

IV

As a matter of form, criticism may be defined as a body of more or less substantial and complete theses. If actual critical books and essays are looked at, criticism will appear to be no more than a great many separate essays and books each of which presents a pretty complete or a pretty scattering set of ideas, of which the latter type is the more moribund. The truth of this characterization will be borne out by an cursory glance at the contents of this volume. Here are fifteen essays, varying in length from five thousand to twenty-five thousand words. Nearly every one is a well-known example of literary criticism, but practically all that can be said, truthfully, of them in common is that each presents the sincere views of the author, that each presents a pretty complete thesis, or central idea, and that each has been more or less widely read and accepted. Yet each, as the footnotes witness, is capable of extension and elaboration. Were they articles, treatises, and books instead of being essays, or were they short reviews and notes they would still be amenable to this description, to wit, — that a critical article, essay, or book, is a piece of writing that aims to present a body of fact or theory about some author or book, — about literature, in short, — to a reader or an audience. Criticism, then, may be judged on purely rhetorical grounds. Aside from the value or the currency of its ideas, it is good criticism in so far as it presents a clear thesis or a coherent body of facts. Like any other piece

of writing it is amenable to sound rhetorical principles. Its clearness is of prime importance.

Any occasion may serve for the display of criticism and any motive may serve for its expression. Desire to explain the vogue of an author ; a zeal, as in Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, to see justice done ; a personal interest and a wish to share a pleasure ; a desire, as with Arnold, to keep people from dying in their literary sins ; the need of money — all these are adequate motives for the production of critical work. Hence criticism may also take any form it pleases. Here, again, we recognize conventional types. The most frequent and most perishable is the book notice, a little shorter lived than the formal book-review ; there is the introductory essay, preface, or prologue ; there is the independent essay, the lecture or address, the critical biography, the literary history. These are matters of more or less formal occasion. They are not essentially different from any forms of discourse or public address, and goodness and badness, from this point of view, has been abundantly treated in books on formal rhetoric or the art of discourse.[1]

From the rhetorical point of view, criticism is sometimes spoken of as if it were a separate form or method of discourse, distinct, that is, from description, narration, exposition, and argumentation. Specific critical essays, however, are, like almost any actual writing, combinations of these forms. Criticism certainly employs description and narration, chiefly by way of illustration, and it is, as has been shown in the present section, in form, a matter of good exposition; in substance it is often largely argumentative.

V

The relation of criticism to argumentation naturally leads to the important question of the proof of which critical opinion is susceptible. Clearly this is a very vital question, and no one should shirk it; for the reason that people are prone to accept the word of critics as final, as fact, whereas the word of critics is, in the first instance, fact only in the sense that it exists in the mind of the critics. What, so to speak, is the objective proof for such opinions, what is the demonstration, what the sanctions for any critical opinion whatsoever? How can critical opinion about books be verified, be accepted as of wider than merely personal intuition and truth?

[1] As, for example, R. C. Ringwalt's *Modern American Oratory*.

These questions are capable of no one answer. It would be a far easier matter for Leslie Stephen to prove the truth of his conclusions about Swift's work for Ireland, than for Matthew Arnold to demonstrate the ultimate value of his touchstones, or for Shelley to substantiate the conception underlying his famous essay. Church records, histories of Ireland, some well-deduced conclusions from well-known facts would furnish Stephen with the proof that he needed. No such facts exist for the establishment of the presumption that a few selected lines of poetry may serve as a gauge for all literary production whatsoever, and most people, even if they grant the truth of Arnold's thesis, are put to it when they try to make a practical application thereof; one can find the "great note" in many things, if one has an ear for great notes or is willing to put up with a little self-deception. The proof for Shelley's position is as general as that which divides into opposing camps the philosophers of the origin of ideas and the reasons why there is such a thing as conscience. The demonstration of much of an essay like Bagehot's is a series of axiomatic (and brilliantly phrased) divisions; if you have a large number of the hoops and have arranged them well, and can shoot tolerably straight through them, you are sure, if you can draw Bagehot's bow of Odysseus, to make some palpable hit. Johnson arrives at his conclusions about the metaphysical poets largely by process of illustration. In a sense one may prove anything by illustration; it is very easy to find some sort of illustration for any thesis that one may wish; Shakespeare has been written down an ass by analysis and illustration; and the charge brought against the fairness and the finality of Johnson is that he failed to give examples of the really admirable side of the poets whom he happens almost immortally to have characterized.

Speaking, in general, there are two chief classes of proof for critical opinion in literary matters. These classes may be shown by an analysis of actual critical essays and books. The first and by far the most common sanction for critical opinion lies in personality, broadly regarded. The ability to express one's opinion tends to create believers in that opinion, and, though opposition may also be aroused, it is in this way that cults are formed and opinion becomes crystallized. Such opinions will be more or less widely held in proportion as they are useful and valuable to the people whom they chance to affect; what seems to be good will hold, what is not useful will perish or be regarded as a curious and

casual expression of by-gone taste. Agreement of opinion on a small scale constitutes a cult or school; on a large scale, held rather subconsciously, agreement goes to make taste, the most potent, though not a fixed, arbiter in matters literary. Personal opinion, then, expanded and diffused till it becomes an affair of wide-spread conviction, of pleasing certitude, finally of common-sense, is really the main sanction and source of support for all critical opinion whatsoever.

That this is so may be shown by two examples, which, though open to the charge of being illustrations, are nevertheless reasonably true. That Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and others are "classics" can be demonstrated only by this method of universal consent, by this broad argument from personality. We do not necessarily read these classics, but we hold them dear, because there are in them elements of permanent value (as it seems) for mankind. It would, perhaps, be more strictly truthful to say that the word "classic" is a term of endearment that we have agreed to apply to books of a certain type, fulfilling certain requirements that we have agreed to like. However that may be, the point is that the place of such books exists in, receives its sanction through, is demonstrable by, popular favour, through a large number of years, over a wide extent of country. Like the American Constitution or the Declaration of Independence, a literary opinion is a human institution, and will be held so long as it is useful and no longer. The demonstration of its truth lies in its utility, just as tastes change and literary taste is modified, when they cease to be agreeable, pleasing, and satisfying.

Lest this should seem too pragmatic a view of criticism to hold, the other illustration may be cited. Just as a plain matter of fact most criticism, as actually written, never trespasses on fundamental ground. Nine-tenths of the actual criticism is in perfect accord with the popular and traditional taste, with popular and traditional morality and ethics. Certain critics, to be sure, thrive and batten on dissent and paradox: but for the most part it is the rôle of the critic to receive as correct the current "collective" opinion — which he is doing something to help form and crystallize. His task is then to find reasons for its correctness. These reasons naturally differ according to the temperament and taste of the critic, as in the variety of reasons found by the distinguished English critics of the first quarter of the nineteenth century for the assumption that Shakespeare is of unparalleled genius. Indeed,

the critics who make us see things in a different light are comparatively few and far between. Dryden, Johnson, Coleridge, Arnold, Pater, to name a few mentioned in this volume, have given new facts and have more or less widely inculcated new ways of looking at things.

The other method of demonstration is of a more scientific sort. What scientific checks, what argumentative methods of the convincing, rather than the persuasive, sort can be applied to critical opinion? Clearly the facts of any established branch of knowledge might be applied to opinions. Thus, modern philology undoubtedly teaches us that Dryden's view of Chaucer's verse is wrong, and a flitting acquaintance with the life of Shakespeare, the history of the stage, or the most common motive for human endeavour, would dispose of the Lamb's paradox that Shakespeare's plays are unfit for stage representation. The facts of philology, of literary history, and even the course of traditional authority are checks to opinion. This matter, of course, requires a very full exposition for satisfactory treatment.

Tests such as are to be used in a legal proceeding may be employed with some result. A critic, who is capable of contradicting himself, is, despite Emerson's famous dictum, not to be taken as a guide to ultimate truth. It is, naturally, reasonable to avoid any such guide to the kingdom of right in literary matters. A prevailing love of paradox, a scorn of common opinion, a contempt for authority, are often entertaining in a critic — where they do not do much real harm — but they do not contribute to one's certitude and peace of mind, if one is in quest of verity. Inaccuracy with regard to facts may, under some circumstances, tend to make a reader hesitate about accepting an opinion as really very authoritative, and yet some of our most charming literary critics are not always exact. Vagueness as to the main thesis may possibly cause one to doubt the minor dicta. It is, for example, a substantial charge to be made against much of Arnold's social criticism, and to some degree against his literary criticism, that after cautioning us against our besetting sins, he tells that we must have something "real." Now, "the real thing" is something that the shortcomings are not, but we never get any nearer to it than that; positively, it remains undefined, and causes beginners in Arnold to scratch their heads and chew their pencils, forgetting that Arnold is a very valuable critic by reason of bringing in new material and new points of view to the attention of his fellow-islanders. "Per-

sonal characteristics that are likely to interfere with the success" — as an intelligence office or a teacher's agency would say — of the critic, as rancour, malice, a desire for revenge, a prevailing flippancy, a slovenly style of address, are in the way of the permanent acceptability of critical opinion. The basis of Mr. Robertson's well-taken attack on Griswold's criticism of Poe is that Griswold stultified himself by harbouring motives of revenge against his dead author. Such a view is coming to be the common verdict with regard to all the Griswoldian criticism. The common view, the commonly accepted opinion — that is the ultimate court of appeal in criticism — that is, like usage in language, what gives even the critic his final place. Argumentative and other tests are but methods of hastening or retarding the process. All induction, so called, in literary criticism must ultimately be based on data supplied by diverse and fallible minds.

In sum, if the preceding analyses are correct, literary criticism is opinion about books, authors, and literary art, with a view, so far as possible, to establishing acceptable fact. Actually, it consists of a *corpus* of opinion, theory, and fact, in the form of reviews, essays, addresses, treatises, casual sayings, and *dicta* generally. It may deal with personality, with ideas, with style, — in short, with any aspect of literature that it please, and still be criticism. It will be good criticism in so far as it utters ideas that it is good for mankind to know, or that contain in themselves substantial demonstration of their truth. It will also be good in proportion as it is orderly, clear, and definite in exposition. It would follow that the essentials of good criticism are, as personal qualities, sincerity, fairness, and candour; as intellectual characteristics, knowledge of the facts, and an ability to use the ordinary rules of logic and common sense; as expression, clear and orderly statement.

VI

Let us pursue the matter into the region of practice. Criticism is a very interesting field for both amusing and disciplinary study, and the writing of critiques is pleasing diversion as well as an occasionally irksome part of the rhetorical curriculum in colleges.

The analysis of criticism and critical essays may be briefly explained. The most important element is surely the material that the critic has to expound and the ideas that he sets forth; his

substance, in short, is, as in any prose work, the first thing to be taken into consideration by the student. The point of view of the writer, that is to say, the kind of proof that he uses in support of his conclusions, is another important element. In short, the essential process is (1) to note the critic's conclusions, and (2) then see the steps by which he reached them. After these may properly come (3) a study of the occasion as effecting the treatment, and (4) an analysis of the structure and style. The actual fact, the soundness of the opinion, the quality and kind of proof, the standards explicit and implicit — these are the important things. For convenience in this analysis, a student should have in mind the extreme types of criticism: impressionism, where an author gives simply and solely his own feeling or opinion without regard to external and objective fact, and a matter-of-fact statement of the collective fact. No writer in this volume quite reaches either extreme. Lamb is nearest to impressionism; Mr. Robertson to collectivism.

The selections in this book will furnish abundant material for analysis. They represent considerable variety of taste and opinion and they are arranged in order from the simplest and most easily demonstrable positions, dealing with particular men, up to the more general and abstract positions, dealing with general theories and points of view. Any body of criticism which the student may pick up will, however, serve as well for the purposes of analytical and disciplinary study. Lowell, Hazlitt, DeQuincey, Carlyle, Ruskin, Mill, Thackeray, Addison, Ben Jonson, Sidney, George Eliot, Hunt, Jeffrey, F. W. H. Myers, R. W. Church, Mark Pattison, G. H. Lewes, and among living critics, Mr. Collins, Mr. Stedman, Mr. Morley, Mr. Courthorpe, Mr. Chesterton, Mr. Archer, Mr. Birrell, Mr. Colvin, Professor Gosse, Professor Saintsbury, Professor Ward, Professor Woodberry, and many others are among the best-known and substantial critics. It must not be forgotten that criticism, to revert to Professor Saintsbury's dictum, is what these men and many others have said about books, and that they have their accepted position because they say things that we gladly hear, though often with reservation and disagreement. Nor must it be forgotten that the aim in reading any critic is not only to find out his opinions but to ascertain how he arrived at them. It is an admirable study, so long as the student does not make many demands on the Real and the Absolute.

VII

To turn to the writing of criticism. In the preface to one of the most handy, compact, complete, and sensible of the many modern text-books on rhetoric, the author [1] says, "In attempts at literary criticism or anything resembling it the average student produces rubbish." And the author adds, with a competence that no one can question, that very few men in any large newspaper office have adequate intellectual equipment for producing respectable criticism. Those of us who have had much experience with the literary production of students will readily admit the truth of the remark; students' criticisms are far too often jejune, attenuated, vague. Young writers are prone to glut their themes with such phrases, to cite actual examples, as "real life," "rare imaginative power and beauty," "a personality of singular charm," "a certain unique style" (of the late General Lew Wallace), "natural," "spontaneous," "deep thought," "appreciation of nature," "striking at the root of things," "underlying thought," "the book itself," "in harmony with its theme," "singular suggestiveness and beauty," "characteristic tone," "distinctly reflective trend" (of, say, J. S. Mill), a "certain something" (there or wanting, as the case may be). Wordsworth's ballads, we are told, "lack charm, power, grace, sympathy, fine sentiment, effectiveness." Sir Thomas Browne's style "is a complete expression of the author's personality." Or, again, "his style is not sustained." Or, referring to the same eminent mystic, "The man himself chiefly interests us — a man of distinctly intellectual quality, and of great richness of imagination and intensity of feeling." George Eliot "understands human nature," but "many of her characters are not universal." "If she does not give us all the truth about life, she touches some of its deeper realities — She loves the deeper problems." "She has a perfectly marvellous insight into human nature. Few, if any, of her characters are overdrawn." Keats "left a poetic heritage rich in classical themes, cloaked in imagery both tropical and delicate, sensuous, breathing an intense love of beauty as beauty." His "*Eve of St. Agnes* holds one under a spell in its romantic loveliness, almost as strong as the weird charm of the *Ancient Mariner*. Such suggestiveness, such exquisite

[1] H. Lamont, *English Composition*.

colouring, such delicate characterization, of youthful Madeline and Porphyro contrasted with the ancient dame and beadsman." "*To a Grecian Urn* is a unique treatment of an unusual idea. With a classic breath he vitalizes the pictorial decorations of the urn, and warms them with the atmosphere of ancient Greece."

Such phrases and dicta, the list of which might be indefinitely prolonged, have repeatedly come under the eye of the reader of themes. To condemn them and, by inference, all student criticism is an easy task, and it is still easier, as probably every teacher has been inclined to do, to laugh at them. But one must plead for a distinction, as Arnold would say. Courses in criticism, the writing of criticism, have assumed a pretty definite place, just as a matter of fact, in many colleges; they are found to be a profitable source of discipline, and students are interested in the subject. The dicta quoted, to be sure, are not interesting; for the most part they stand for genuine impressions that young readers have; but they are either very vague and so obvious that one could guess at them with his eyes shut, or they are very exclamatory, and in either case half a dozen pages of such talk is not good. They are nearly as low as the "red blood" or the "vital, absorbing interest" of the stories that "grip" you, like the influenza, in a newspaper review or its twin brother, the publisher's advertisement of the latest novel. The remedy is largely a rhetorical one, and is more easily stated than applied; for the application of any precept usually calls for much fasting and prayer. Stated, it is simply that students should be required to say fewer things and to say each more definitely.

General faults of most frequent occurrence will be found to lie in the region of the intellectual conscience and in the manner of expression. As to the first of these, students are prone to say too many things and to say more than they really know. They deal, perhaps, too largely with personal "appeal," yet, if their exposition of their own impressions was clear and forcible, much could be said for such limitation. But the danger is that they will look at an author in terms of a naturally narrow experience, instead of tak ing him in his own terms, merely, so to speak, as a matter of fact. A student will sometimes assert, with undoubted truth, surely, that he doesn't see how Thoreau, say, could have lived alone in the woods and cooked his own meals as he did, because, forsooth, modern city houses, with good plumbing and a bevy of cooks, are good enough for the critic. Doubtless this attitude is more

wholesome than the sentimental one would be, but it does not conduce to an understanding of Thoreau. Nor is it possible to agree with the earnest conviction of a conscientious young woman that Boswell gives a wholly wrong impression of Johnson, for as a matter of fact nearly everything that we know of Johnson comes from Boswell. A common attitude is for students to apologize for their authors — for Franklin, say, or Poe — a thing that seems to be quite irrelevant. Students will gravely discuss the question as to whether Emma is a better character than Romola, wholly forgetting to discriminate between the artistic problem involved and the personal reaction, and assuming too blithely that the two are really comparable. Again, a young critic will be disappointed because Maggie Tulliver "is different from what we expected." Strictly a reader has no business to expect anything different from what the writer chooses to give him; the reader is not bound to like the feast, but that is his fault for having his expectations too keen. Or rather it is the fault of the teacher from too much preliminary praise. The main point is that young writers, when they commit any such typical faults as have been mentioned, when they fall into vagueness, or when they make sweeping assertions, err in that they do not canvass the ground to see what is really possible and legitimate, logical and honest, for them to know. As an eradicator of such intellectual sins, a course in criticism is very valuable. "What does it mean?" is the great question to ask.

As to the rhetorical side of the matter, the chief trouble seems to be that young writers try to say too many things, not only with resulting vagueness, but a generally scattering effect. Too many points — that is a thing to be avoided and shunned. One small train of thought is about all that anybody can manage in the course of five hundred or one thousand words, the usual length for college exercises. Against the desirable centrality of effect, there operates the patchwork spirit. It is typical, widely so, for students to begin with an introduction — "a kind of an introduction" is the term that usually describes it. This, however, seldom introduces: the idea comes to a close, an *impasse* is formed, into the head wall of which the writer butts; he has to fall back to a new subject in paragraph two. This is often a summary of the work under discussion, and in itself it may be a good one; the trouble is that it has no necessary connection with the comment to follow. A summary is really nothing but the necessary exposition of what is under discussion, and should accordingly be written with that in view. It is not a

mere appanage, but an integral part of the whole composition. Bagehot's well-known summary of *Enoch Arden* [1] is an excellent example of how a summary may be subordinated to the central idea. Another common way to produce a scattering effect is to use the term "some" as a qualifying adjective to the title: out of a complete and possible ten, say, topics connected with the subject, you may use at random numbers, 5, 3, and 8 — a thing which happens in many themes.

The only possible motive for mentioning these and other typical faults which will occur to every experienced teacher, is to aid in the avoidance of them, to help the student to think more clearly. The only safe assumption in the teaching of composition is that the young writer has something to say which he wishes to say to somebody. To train him to express his idea and to express it in a way that somebody else will understand and be interested in is, of course, the only end of instruction in composition, — that is, after the most elementary training is done.

A word, therefore, of a more positive kind may be added. In single themes of a critical sort, it is well to pin the student down to definite answers to the three immemorial questions of Coleridge: What has the author tried to do? How has he done it? Is it worth doing? The answers will involve a good deal of thinking, and considerable additional skill will have to be employed to make them compose into a fluent and solid piece of work. They admirably serve to put a writer into leading strings and to give him his structure. They are also sound, in that they take into account the author's point of view in criticising his work.

A more extended program may be offered to advanced students. It is not a bad plan — subject, of course, to many modifications of detail — to make the study of one author for each student the basis of a term's writing. The author should naturally be one for whom the student has some previous liking, and he should be of medium size. Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, are altogether too large and too much has been said about them. On the other hand it is doubtful if luminaries of the magnitude of Mrs. Hemans, "Barry Cornwall," Allan Ramsay, Eugene Field, E. R. Sill, even Holmes, are sufficiently bright to lighten the way of most students over the trackless path of a term of months. DeQuincey, Lowell,

[1] *Literary Studies*, Vol. II; *Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in Poetry.* Cf. G. R. Carpenter and W. T. Brewster, *Modern English Prose.*

George Eliot, and such writers, where they are not too much talked about, are more ponderable. It is a wholesome practice, by way of introduction, to ask each student, without referring to any book of comment, to set down, in a preliminary theme, what he knows or deems it essential to say about the author he has chosen. There should properly follow a compact biography of the author, a plain matter of ascertainable fact, well arranged and divided, without criticism. This is no easy task; for biographies by young writers are likely to be top-heavy and lumpy. A third essay might properly be a classification of the author's works, with a view to bringing out the forms that he uses, their relative importance, and the range of his ideas. It may be remarked in passing that literary classification is a stumbling-block to many writers. It seems easy, but to find, in practice, some fit scheme for bringing out the ideas and forms of an author is no such matter. To name a type, properly to characterize and illustrate it, and to list the specific writings that fall under the class — the essentials of good classification in literature — is often very baffling. Such classification may be based on the author's life, as with Lamb and Addison, whose careers were experiments in various literary forms, of which one was eminently successful; it may be based on the occasion of his writing, as with Swift, who was very nearly uniformly successful in all that he did after he was once started on his literary way; it may be a matter of substance, as with the somewhat elaborate classification of DeQuincey's writings in this volume. There are other appropriate ways.

With a good classification as a basis, a variety of possibilities offers itself. A fourth theme may be written on a man's ideas, if the intellectual side is the stronger, or on his quality if it is his literary feeling that predominates. That which distinguishes him from other writers of his class, intellectually and spiritually, is surely a thing worth exposition. Another important source of material for a theme is found in the author's literary art, his method of approaching his task, his style, considered as a combination of phenomena. What things are characteristic and constant in the writings of Arnold, or Keats, or Landor? Naturally discussion of these points tends to run off into questions of quality, but the two may approximately be kept apart. Any criticism that the student has to offer, either by way of personal impression or impersonal discussion, is a good subject for another essay. Here, experience shows, students are likely to forget what

they have been talking about in their preceding themes: in biography, classification, and account of quality, a student may have shown George Eliot, say, to be a great moralist; and yet the criticism may have nothing to do with the ethics of George Eliot but may deal with the irrelevant question of the mechanics of her verse. In short, one should criticise along the lines indicated by the classification and not abjure all preceding labour and knowledge. With regard to another theme, it is most important of all that a student should learn to state, just as a plain matter of fact, what is the vogue, the estimation, the place, etc., in which his author is held. Such "collective" criticism requires considerable research, but is a most necessary check to one's own judgment.

Any special program is, of course, merely by way of illustration and suggestion; the main point is that young writers will avoid the production of rubbish in criticism, only by following sound expository and argumentative methods. The good critic, like other good men, is doubtless more born than made; but there is no real reason why any painstaking student may not learn clearly, adequately, and in an interesting way, to express the faith that is in him. If the foregoing argument is sound, the fact that criticism is largely nothing more than the expression of personal, often temperamental, opinion, — checked, for the better part, by historical and rational tests, — this fact should make the young critic more confident of his own views and, at the same time, more willing to modify them and to test them.

I

LESLIE STEPHEN

(1832–1904)

WOOD'S HALFPENCE

[Chapter VII. of the *Life of Swift* in the English Men of Letters Series]

In one of Scott's finest novels the old Cameronian preacher, who had been left for dead by Claverhouse's troopers, suddenly rises to confront his conquerors, and spends his last breath in denouncing the oppressors of the saints. Even such an apparition was Jonathan Swift to comfortable Whigs who were flourishing in the place of Harley and St. John, when, after ten years' quiescence, he suddenly stepped into the political arena. After the first crushing fall he had abandoned partial hope, and contented himself with establishing supremacy in his chapter. But undying wrath smouldered in his breast till time came for an outburst.

No man had ever learnt more thoroughly the lesson, "Put not your faith in princes;" or had been impressed with a lower estimate of the wisdom displayed by the rulers of the world. He had been behind the scenes, and knew that the wisdom of great ministers meant just enough cunning to court the ruin which a little common sense would have avoided. Corruption was at the prow and folly at the helm. The selfish ring which he had denounced so fiercely had triumphed. It had triumphed, as he held, by flattering the new dynasty, hoodwinking the nation, and maligning its antagonists. The cynical theory of politics was not for him, as for some comfortable cynics, an abstract proposition, which mattered very little to a sensible man, but was embodied in the bitter wrath with which he regarded his triumphant adversaries. Pessimism is perfectly compatible with bland enjoyment of the good things in a bad world; but Swift's pessimism was not of this

type. It meant energetic hatred of definite things and people who were always before him.

With this feeling he had come to Ireland; and Ireland — I am speaking of a century and a half ago — was the opprobrium of English statesmanship. There Swift had (or thought he had) always before him a concrete example of the basest form of tyranny. By Ireland, I have said, Swift meant, in the first place, the English in Ireland. In the last years of his sanity he protested indignantly against the confusion between the "savage old Irish" and the English gentry, who, he said, were much better bred, spoke better English, and were more civilized than the inhabitants of many English counties.[1] He retained to the end of his life his antipathy to the Scotch colonists. He opposed their demand for political equality as fiercely in the last as in his first political utterances. He contrasted them unfavourably[2] with the Catholics, who had, indeed, been driven to revolt by massacre and confiscation under Puritan rule, but who were now, he declared, "true Whigs, in the best and most proper sense of the word," and thoroughly loyal to the house of Hanover. Had there been a danger of a Catholic revolt, Swift's feelings might have been different; but he always held that they were "as inconsiderable as the women and children," mere "hewers of wood and drawers of water," "out of all capacity of doing any mischief, if they were ever so well inclined."[3] Looking at them in this way, he felt a sincere compassion for their misery and a bitter resentment against their oppressors. The English, he said in a remarkable letter,[4] should be ashamed of their reproaches of Irish dulness, ignorance, and cowardice. Those defects were the products of slavery. He declared that the poor cottagers had "a much better natural taste for good sense, humour, and raillery than ever I observed among people of the like sort in England. But the millions of oppressions they lie under, the tyranny of their landlords, the ridiculous zeal of their priests, and the misery of the whole nation, have been enough to damp the best spirits under the sun." Such a view is now commonplace enough. It was then a heresy to English statesmen, who thought that nobody but a Papist or a Jacobite could object to the tyranny of Whigs.

Swift's diagnosis of the chronic Irish disease was thoroughly political. He considered that Irish misery sprang from the sub-

[1] Letter to Pope, July 13, 1737.
[2] *Catholic Reasons for Repealing the Test.*
[3] *Letters on Sacramental Test in* 1738.
[4] To Sir Charles Wigan, July, 1732.

jection to a government not intentionally cruel, but absolutely selfish; to which the Irish revenue meant so much convenient political plunder, and which acted on the principle quoted from Cowley, that the happiness of Ireland should not weigh against the "least conveniency" of England. He summed up his views in a remarkable letter,[1] to be presently mentioned, the substance of which had been orally communicated to Walpole. He said to Walpole, as he said in every published utterance: first, that the colonists were still Englishmen, and entitled to English rights; secondly, that their trade was deliberately crushed, purely for the benefit of the English of England; thirdly, that all valuable preferments were bestowed upon men born in England, as a matter of course; and, finally, that in consequence of this the upper classes, deprived of all other openings, were forced to rack-rent their tenants to such a degree that not one farmer in the kingdom out of a hundred "could afford shoes or stockings to his children, or to eat flesh or drink anything better than sour milk and water twice in a year; so that the whole country, except the Scotch plantation in the north, is a scene of misery and desolation hardly to be matched on this side Lapland." A modern reformer would give the first and chief place to this social misery. It is characteristic that Swift comes to it as a consequence from the injustice to his own class: as, again, that he appeals to Walpole, not on the simple ground that the people are wretched, but on the ground that they will be soon unable to pay the tribute to England, which he reckons at a million a year. But his conclusion might be accepted by any Irish patriot. Whatever, he says, can make a country poor and despicable concurs in the case of Ireland. The nation is controlled by laws to which it does not consent; disowned by its brethren and countrymen; refused the liberty of trading even in its natural commodities; forced to seek for justice many hundred miles by sea and land; rendered in a manner incapable of serving the King and country in any place of honour, trust, or profit; whilst the governors have no sympathy with the governed, except what may occasionally arise from the sense of justice and philanthropy.

I am not to ask how far Swift was right in his judgments. Every line which he wrote shows that he was thoroughly sincere and profoundly stirred by his convictions. A remarkable pamphlet, published in 1720, contained his first utterance upon the

[1] To Lord Peterborough, April 21, 1726.

subject. It is an exhortation to the Irish to use only Irish manufactures. He applies to Ireland the fable of *Arachne and Pallas*. The goddess, indignant at being equalled in spinning, turned her rival into a spider, to spin forever out of her own bowels in a narrow compass. He always, he says, pitied poor Arachne for so cruel and unjust a sentence, "which, however, is fully executed upon us by England with further additions of rigour and severity; for the greatest part of our bowels and vitals is extracted, without allowing us the liberty of spinning and weaving them." Swift of course accepts the economic fallacy equally taken for granted by his opponents, and fails to see that England and Ireland injured themselves as well as each other by refusing to interchange their productions. But he utters forcibly his righteous indignation against the contemptuous injustice of the English rulers, in consequence of which the "miserable people" are being reduced "to a worse condition than the peasants in France, or the vassals in Germany and Poland." Slaves, he says, have a natural disposition to be tyrants; and he himself, when his betters give him a kick, is apt to revenge it with six upon his footman. That is how the landlords treat their tenantry.

The printer of this pamphlet was prosecuted. The chief justice (Whitshed) sent back the jury nine times and kept them eleven hours before they would consent to bring in a "special verdict." The unpopularity of the prosecution became so great that it was at last dropped. Four years afterwards a more violent agitation broke out. A patent had been given to a certain William Wood for supplying Ireland with a copper coinage. Many complaints had been made, and in September, 1723, addresses were voted by the Irish Houses of Parliament, declaring that the patent had been obtained by clandestine and false representations; that it was mischievous to the country; and that Wood had been guilty of frauds in his coinage. They were pacified by vague promises; but Walpole went on with the scheme on the strength of a favourable report of a committee of the Privy Council; and the excitement was already serious when (in 1724) Swift published the *Drapier's Letters*, which give him his chief title to eminence as a patriotic agitator.

Swift either shared or took advantage of the general belief that the mysteries of the currency are unfathomable to the human intelligence. They have to do with that world of financial magic in which wealth may be made out of paper, and all ordinary

relations of cause and effect are suspended. There is, however, no real mystery about the halfpence. The small coins which do not form part of the legal tender may be considered primarily as counters. A penny is a penny, so long as twelve are change for a shilling. It is not in the least necessary for this purpose that the copper contained in the twelve penny pieces should be worth or nearly worth a shilling. A sovereign can never be worth much more than the gold of which it is made. But at the present day bronze worth only twopence is coined into twelve penny pieces.[1] The coined bronze is worth six times as much as the uncoined. The small coins must have some intrinsic value to deter forgery, and must be made of good materials to stand wear and tear. If these conditions be observed, and a proper number be issued, the value of the penny will be no more affected by the value of the copper than the value of the banknote by that of the paper on which it is written. This opinion assumes that the copper coins cannot be offered or demanded in payment of any but trifling debts. The halfpence coined by Wood seem to have fulfilled these conditions, and as copper worth twopence (on the lowest computation) was coined into ten halfpence, worth fivepence, their intrinsic value was more than double that of modern halfpence.

The halfpence, then, were not objectionable upon this ground. Nay, it would have been wasteful to make them more valuable. It would have been as foolish to use more copper for the pence as to make the works of a watch of gold if brass is equally durable and convenient. But another consequence is equally clear. The effect of Wood's patent was that a mass of copper worth about 60,000*l.*[2] became worth 100,800*l.* in the shape of halfpenny pieces. There was, therefore, a balance of about 40,000*l.* to pay for the expenses of coinage. It would have been waste to get rid of this by putting more copper in the coins; but, if so large a profit arose from the transaction, it would go to somebody. At the present day it would be brought into the national treasury. This was not the way in which business was done in Ireland.

[1] The ton of bronze, I am informed, is coined into 108,000 pence; that is, 450*l.* The metal is worth about 74*l.*

[2] Simon, in his work on the Irish coinage, makes the profit 60,000*l.*; but he reckons the copper at 1*s.* a pound, whereas from the Report of the Privy Council it would seem to be properly 1*s.* 6*d.* a pound. Swift and most later writers say 108,000*l.*, but the right sum is 100,800*l.* — 360 tons coined into 2*s.* 6*d.* a pound.

Wood was to pay 1000*l.* a year for fourteen years to the Crown.[1] But 14,000*l.* still leaves a large margin for profit. What was to become of it? According to the admiring biographer of Sir R. Walpole the patent had been originally given by Lord Sunderland to the Duchess of Kendal, a lady whom the King delighted to honour. She already received 3000*l.* a year in pensions upon the Irish Establishment, and she sold this patent to Wood for 10,000*l.* Enough was still left to give Wood a handsome profit; as in transactions of this kind every accomplice in a dirty business expects to be well paid. So handsome, indeed, was the profit that Wood received ultimately a pension of 3000*l.* for eight years — 24,000*l.*, that is — in consideration of abandoning the patent. It was right and proper that a profit should be made on the transaction, but shameful that it should be divided between the King's mistress and William Wood, and that the bargain should be struck without consulting the Irish representatives, and maintained in spite of their protests. The Duchess of Kendal was to be allowed to take a share of the wretched halfpence in the pocket of every Irish beggar. A more disgraceful transaction could hardly be imagined, or one more calculated to justify Swift's view of the selfishness and corruption of the English rulers.

Swift saw his chance, and went to work in characteristic fashion, with unscrupulous audacity of statement, guided by the keenest strategical instinct. He struck at the heart as vigorously as he had done in the *Examiner*, but with resentment sharpened by ten years of exile. It was not safe to speak of the Duchess of Kendal's share in the transaction, though the story, as poor Archdeacon Coxe pathetically declares, was industriously propagated. But the case against Wood was all the stronger. Is he so wicked, asks Swift, as to suppose that a nation is to be ruined that he may gain three or four score thousand pounds? Hampden went to prison, he says, rather than pay a few shillings wrongfully; I, says Swift, would rather be hanged than have all my "property taxed at seventeen shillings in the pound at the arbitrary will and pleasure of the venerable Mr. Wood." A simple constitutional precedent might rouse a Hampden; but to stir a popular agitation it is as well to show that the evil actually inflicted is gigantic, independently of possible results. It requires, indeed, some audacity to prove that debasement of the copper currency can amount to

[1] Monck Mason says only 300*l.* a year, but this is the sum mentioned in the Report and by Swift.

a tax of seventeen shillings in the pound on all property. Here, however, Swift might simply throw the reins upon the neck of his fancy. Anybody may make any inferences he pleases in the mysterious regions of currency; and no inferences, it seems, were too audacious for his hearers, though we are left to doubt how far Swift's wrath had generated delusions in his own mind, and how far he perceived that other minds were ready to be deluded. He revels in prophesying the most extravagant consequences. The country will be undone; the tenants will not be able to pay their rents; "the farmers must rob, or beg, or leave the country; the shopkeepers in this and every other town must break or starve; the squire will hoard up all his good money to send to England and keep some poor tailor or weaver in his house, who will be glad to get bread at any rate." [1] Concrete facts are given to help the imagination. Squire Connolly must have 250 horses to bring his half-yearly rents to town; and the poor man will have to pay thirty-six of Wood's halfpence to get a quart of twopenny ale.

How is this proved? One argument is a sufficient specimen. Nobody, according to the patent, was to be forced to take Wood's halfpence; nor could any one be obliged to receive more than fivepence halfpenny in any one payment. This, of course, meant that the halfpence could only be used as change, and a man must pay his debts in silver or gold whenever it was possible to use a sixpence. It upsets Swift's statement about Squire Connolly's rents. But Swift is equal to the emergency. The rule means, he says, that every man must take fivepence halfpenny in every payment, *if it be offered;* which, on the next page, becomes simply in every payment; therefore, making an easy assumption or two, he reckons that you will receive 160*l.* a year in these halfpence; and therefore (by other assumptions) lose 140*l.* a year.[2] It might have occurred to Swift, one would think, that both parties to the transaction could not possibly be losers. But he calmly assumes that the man who pays will lose in proportion to the increased number of coins; and the man who receives, in proportion to the depreciated value of each coin. He does not see, or think it worth notice, that the two losses obviously counterbalance each other; and he has an easy road to prophesying absolute ruin for everybody. It would be almost as great a compliment to call this sophistry as to dignify with the name of satire a round assertion that an honest man is a cheat or a rogue.

[1] Letter I. [2] Letter II.

The real grievance, however, shows through the sham argument. "It is no loss of honour," thought Swift, "to submit to the lion; but who, with the figure of a man, can think with patience of being devoured alive by a rat?" Why should Wood have this profit (even if more reasonably estimated) in defiance of the wishes of the nation? It is, says Swift, because he is an Englishman and has great friends. He proposes to meet the attempt by a general agreement not to take the halfpence. Briefly, the halfpence were to be "Boycotted."

Before this second letter was written the English ministers had become alarmed. A report of the Privy Council (July 24, 1724) defended the patent, but ended by recommending that the amount to be coined should be reduced to 40,000*l*. Carteret was sent out as Lord Lieutenant to get this compromise accepted. Swift replied by a third letter, arguing the question of the patent, which he can "never suppose," or, in other words, which everybody knew, to have been granted as a "job for the interest of some particular person." He vigorously asserts that the patent can never make it obligatory to accept the halfpence, and tells a story much to the purpose from old Leicester experience. The justices had reduced the price of ale to three-halfpence a quart. One of them, therefore, requested that they would make another order to appoint who should drink it, "for, by God," said he, "I will not."

The argument thus naturally led to a further and more important question. The discussion as to the patent brought forward the question of right. Wood and his friends, according to Swift, had begun to declare that the resistance meant Jacobitism and rebellion; they asserted that the Irish were ready to shake off their dependence upon the Crown of England. Swift took up the challenge and answered resolutely and eloquently. He took up the broadest ground. Ireland, he declared, depended upon England in no other sense than that in which England depended upon Ireland. Whoever thinks otherwise, he said, "I, M. B. Drapier, desire to be excepted; for I declare, next under God, I depend only on the King my sovereign, and the laws of my own country. I am so far," he added, "from depending upon the people of England, that, if they should rebel, I would take arms and lose every drop of my blood to hinder the Pretender from being King of Ireland."

It had been reported that somebody (Walpole presumably) had sworn to thrust the halfpence down the throats of the Irish.

The remedy, replied Swift, is totally in your own hands, "and therefore I have digressed a little . . . to let you see that by the laws of God, of nature, of nations, and of your own country, you are and ought to be as free a people as your brethren in England." As Swift had already said in the third letter, no one could believe that any English patent would stand half an hour after an address from the English Houses of Parliament such as that which had been passed against Wood's by the Irish Parliament. Whatever constitutional doubts might be raised, it was, therefore, come to be the plain question whether or not the English ministers should simply override the wishes of the Irish nation.

Carteret, upon landing, began by trying to suppress his adversary. A reward of 300*l.* was offered for the discovery of the author of the fourth letter. A prosecution was ordered against the printer. Swift went to the levée of the Lord Lieutenant, and reproached him bitterly for his severity against a poor tradesman who had published papers for the good of his country. Carteret answered in a happy quotation from Virgil, a feat which always seems to have brought consolation to the statesman of that day:—

> "Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt
> Moliri." [1]

Another story is more characteristic. Swift's butler had acted as his amanuensis, and absented himself one night whilst the proclamation was running. Swift thought that the butler was either treacherous or presuming upon his knowledge of the secret. As soon as the man returned he ordered him to strip off his livery and begone. "I am in your power," he said, "and for that very reason I will not stand your insolence." The poor butler departed, but preserved his fidelity; and Swift, when the tempest had blown over, rewarded him by appointing him verger in the cathedral. The grand jury threw out the bill against the printer in spite of all Whitshed's efforts; they were discharged; and the next grand jury presented Wood's halfpence as a nuisance. Carteret gave way, the patent was surrendered, and Swift might congratulate himself upon a complete victory.

The conclusion is in one respect rather absurd. The Irish succeeded in rejecting a real benefit at the cost of paying Wood

[1] [The savage state of affairs and the rawness of the realm compel me to do such things.]

the profit which he would have made, had he been allowed to confer it. Another point must be admitted. Swift's audacious misstatements were successful for the time in rousing the spirit of the people. They have led, however, to a very erroneous estimate of the whole case. English statesmen and historians [1] have found it so easy to expose his errors that they have thought his whole case absurd. The grievance was not what it was represented; therefore it is argued that there was no grievance. The very essence of the case was that the Irish people were to be plundered by the German mistress; and such plunder was possible because the English people, as Swift says, never thought of Ireland except when there was nothing else to be talked of in the coffee-houses.[2] Owing to the conditions of the controversy this grievance only came out gradually, and could never be fully stated. Swift could never do more than hint at the transaction. His letters (including three which appeared after the last mentioned, enforcing the same case) have often been cited as models of eloquence, and compared to Demosthenes. We must make some deduction from this, as in the case of his former political pamphlets. The intensity of his absorption in the immediate end deprives them of some literary merits; and we, to whom the sophistries are palpable enough, are apt to resent them. Anybody can be effective in a way, if he chooses to lie boldly. Yet, in another sense, it is hard to over-praise the letters. They have in a high degree the peculiar stamp of Swift's genius: the vein of the most nervous common-sense and pithy assertion, with an undercurrent of intense passion, the more impressive because it is never allowed to exhale in mere rhetoric.

Swift's success, the dauntless front which he had shown to the oppressor, made him the idol of his countrymen. A Drapier's Club was formed in his honour, which collected the letters and drank toasts and sang songs to celebrate their hero. In a sad letter to Pope, in 1737, he complains that none of his equals care for him; but adds that as he walks the streets he has "a thousand hats and blessings upon old scores which those we call the gentry have forgot." The people received him as their champion. When he returned from England, in 1726, bells were rung, bonfires lighted, and a guard of honour escorted him to the deanery.

[1] See, for example, Lord Stanhope's account. For the other view see Mr. Lecky's *History of the Eighteenth Century* and Mr. Froude's *English in Ireland*.
[2] Letter IV.

Towns voted him their freedom and received him like a prince. When Walpole spoke of arresting him a prudent friend told the minister that the messenger would require a guard of ten thousand soldiers. Corporations asked his advice in elections, and the weavers appealed to him on questions about their trade. In one of his satires [1] Swift had attacked a certain Sergeant Bettesworth: —

> "Thus at the bar the booby Bettesworth,
> Though half-a-crown o'erpays his sweat's worth."

Bettesworth called upon him with, as Swift reports, a knife in his pocket, and complained in such terms as to imply some intention of personal violence. The neighbours instantly sent a deputation to the Dean, proposing to take vengeance upon Bettesworth; and though he induced them to disperse peaceably, they formed a guard to watch the house; and Bettesworth complained that his attack upon the Dean had lowered his professional income by 1200*l.* a year. A quaint example of his popularity is given by Sheridan. A great crowd had collected to see an eclipse. Swift thereupon sent out the bellman to give notice that the eclipse had been postponed by the Dean's orders, and the crowd dispersed.

Influence with the people, however, could not bring Swift back to power. At one time there seemed to be a gleam of hope. Swift visited England twice in 1726 and 1727. He paid long visits to his old friend Pope, and again met Bolingbroke, now returned from exile, and trying to make a place in English politics. Peterborough introduced the Dean to Walpole, to whom Swift detailed his views upon Irish politics. Walpole was the last man to set about a great reform from mere considerations of justice and philanthropy, and was not likely to trust a confidant of Bolingbroke. He was civil but indifferent. Swift, however, was introduced by his friends to Mrs. Howard, the mistress of the Prince of Wales, soon to become George II. The Princess, afterwards Queen Caroline, ordered Swift to come and see her, and he complied, as he says, after nine commands. He told her that she had lately seen a wild boy from Germany, and now he supposed she wanted to see a wild Dean from Ireland. Some civilities passed; Swift offered some plaids of Irish manufacture, and the Princess promised some medals in return. When, in

[1] "On the words Brother Protestants, &c."

the next year, George I. died, the Opposition hoped great things from the change. Pulteney had tried to get Swift's powerful help for the *Craftsman*, the Opposition organ; and the Opposition hoped to upset Walpole. Swift, who had thought of going to France for his health, asked Mrs. Howard's advice. She recommended him to stay; and he took the recommendation as amounting to a promise of support. He had some hopes of obtaining English preferment in exchange for his deanery in what he calls (in the date to one of his letters [1]) "wretched Dublin in miserable Ireland." It soon appeared, however, that the mistress was powerless; and that Walpole was to be as firm as ever in his seat. Swift returned to Ireland, never again to leave it: to lose soon afterwards his beloved Stella, and nurse an additional grudge against courts and favourites.

The bitterness with which he resented Mrs. Howard's supposed faithlessness is painfully illustrative, in truth, of the morbid state of mind which was growing upon him. "You think," he says to Bolingbroke in 1729, "as I ought to think, that it is time for me to have done with the world; and so I would, if I could get into a better before I was called into the best, and not die here in a rage, like a poisoned rat in a hole." That terrible phrase expresses but too vividly the state of mind which was now becoming familiar to him. Separated by death and absence from his best friends, and tormented by increasing illness, he looked out upon a state of things in which he could see no ground for hope. The resistance to Wood's halfpence had staved off immediate ruin, but had not cured the fundamental evil. Some tracts upon Irish affairs, written after the *Drapier's Letters*, sufficiently indicate his despairing vein. "I am," he says in 1737, when proposing some remedy for the swarms of beggars in Dublin, "a desponder by nature;" and he has found out that the people will never stir themselves to remove a single grievance. His old prejudices were as keen as ever, and could dictate personal outbursts. He attacked the bishops bitterly for offering certain measures which in his view sacrificed the permanent interests of the Church to that of the actual occupants. He showed his own sincerity by refusing to take fines for leases which would have benefited himself at the expense of his successors. With equal earnestness he still clung to the Test Acts, and assailed the Protestant Dissenters with all his old bitterness, and ridiculed their claims to

[1] To Lord Stafford, November 26, 1725.

brotherhood with Churchmen. To the end he was a Churchman before everything. One of the last of his poetical performances was prompted by the sanction given by the Irish Parliament to an opposition to certain "titles of ejectment." He had defended the right of the Irish Parliament against English rulers; but when it attacked the interests of his Church his fury showed itself in the most savage satire that he ever wrote, the *Legion Club*. It is an explosion of wrath tinged with madness: —

> "Could I from the building's top
> Hear the rattling thunder drop,
> While the devil upon the roof
> (If the devil be thunder-proof)
> Should with poker fiery red
> Crack the stones and melt the lead,
> Drive them down on every skull
> When the den of thieves is full;
> Quite destroy the harpies' nest,
> How might this our isle be blest!"

What follows fully keeps up to this level. Swift flings filth like a maniac, plunges into ferocious personalities, and ends fitly with the execration —

> "May their God, the devil, confound them!"

He was seized with one of his fits whilst writing the poem, and was never afterwards capable of sustained composition.

Some further pamphlets — especially one on the State of Ireland — repeat and enforce his views. One of them requires special mention. The *Modest Proposal* (written in 1729) *for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from being a Burden to their Parents or Country* — the proposal being that they should be turned into articles of food — gives the very essence of Swift's feeling, and is one of the most tremendous pieces of satire in existence. It shows the quality already noticed. Swift is burning with a passion the glow of which makes other passions look cold, as it is said that some bright lights cause other illuminating objects to cast a shadow. Yet his face is absolutely grave, and he details his plan as calmly as a modern projector suggesting the importation of Australian meat. The superficial coolness may be revolting to tender-hearted people, and has, indeed, led to condemnation of the supposed ferocity of the author almost as surprising as the criticisms which can see in it nothing but an exquisite piece of humour. It is, in truth,

fearful to read even now. Yet we can forgive and even sympathize when we take it for what it really is — the most complete expression of burning indignation against intolerable wrongs. It utters, indeed, a serious conviction. "I confess myself," says Swift in a remarkable paper,[1] "to be touched with a very sensible pleasure when I hear of a mortality in any country parish or village, where the wretches are forced to pay for a filthy cabin and two ridges of potatoes treble the worth; brought up to steal and beg for want of work; to whom death would be the best thing to be wished for, on account both of themselves and the public." He remarks in the same place on the lamentable contradiction presented in Ireland to the maxim that the "people are the riches of a nation," and the *Modest Proposal* is the fullest comment on this melancholy reflection. After many visionary proposals he has at last hit upon the plan, which has at least the advantage that by adopting it "we can incur no danger of disobliging England. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, the flesh being of too tender a consistence to admit a long continuance in salt, although, perhaps, I could name a country which would be glad to eat up a whole nation without it."

Swift once asked Delany[2] whether the "corruptions and villanies of men in power did not eat his flesh and exhaust his spirits?" "No," said Delany. "Why, how can you help it?" said Swift. "Because," replied Delany, "I am commanded to the contrary — *fret not thyself because of the ungodly.*" That, like other wise maxims, is capable of an ambiguous application. As Delany took it, Swift might perhaps have replied that it was a very comfortable maxim — for the ungodly. His own application of Scripture is different. It tells us, he says, in his proposal for using Irish manufactures, that "oppression makes a wise man mad." If, therefore, some men are not mad, it must be because they are not wise. In truth, it is characteristic of Swift that he could never learn the great lesson of submission even to the inevitable. He could not, like an easy-going Delany, submit to oppression which might possibly be resisted with success; but as little could he submit when all resistance was hopeless. His rage, which could find no better outlet, burnt inwardly and drove him mad. It is very interesting to compare Swift's wrathful denunciations with Berkeley's treatment of the same before in the *Querist* (1735–'37). Berkeley is

[1] *Maxims Controlled in Ireland.*

[2] Delany, p. 148.

full of luminous suggestions upon economical questions which are entirely beyond Swift's mark. He is in a region quite above the sophistries of the *Drapier's Letters*. He sees equally the terrible grievance that no people in the world is so beggarly, wretched, and destitute as the common Irish. But he thinks all complaints against the English rule useless, and therefore foolish. If the English restrain our trade ill-advisedly, is it not, he asks, plainly our interest to accommodate ourselves to them? (No. 136.) Have we not the advantage of English protection without sharing English responsibilities? He asks "whether England doth not really love us and wish well to us as bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh? and whether it be not our part to cultivate this love and affection all manner of ways?" (Nos. 322, 323.) One can fancy how Swift must have received this characteristic suggestion of the admirable Berkeley, who could not bring himself to think ill of any one. Berkeley's main contention is, no doubt, sound in itself, namely, that the welfare of the country really depended on the industry and economy of its inhabitants, and that such qualities would have made the Irish comfortable in spite of all English restrictions and Government abuses. But, then, Swift might well have answered that such general maxims are idle. It is all very well for divines to tell people to become good, and to find out that then they will be happy. But how are they to be made good? Are the Irish intrinsically worse than other men, or is their laziness and restlessness due to special and removable circumstances? In the latter case is there not more real value in attacking tangible evils than in propounding general maxims and calling upon all men to submit to oppression, and even to believe in the oppressor's good-will, in the name of Christian charity? To answer those questions would be to plunge into interminable and hopeless controversies. Meanwhile, Swift's fierce indignation against English oppression might almost as well have been directed against a law of nature for any immediate result. Whether the rousing of the national spirit was any benefit is a question which I must leave to others. In any case, the work, however darkened by personal feeling or love of class-privilege, expressed as hearty a hatred of oppression as ever animated a human being.

II

DAVID MASSON

(1822)

DE QUINCEY'S WRITINGS: CLASSIFICATION AND REVIEW

[Chapter XII. of the *Life of De Quincey* in the English Men of Letters]

How are De Quincey's writings to be classified? His own classification, propounded in the General Preface to the edition of his Collected Works, was to the effect that they might be distributed roughly into three sorts, — *first*, those papers of fact and reminiscence the object of which was primarily to amuse the reader, though they might reach to a higher interest, *e.g.* the *Autobiographic Sketches; secondly*, essays proper, or papers addressing themselves purely or primarily to "the understanding as an insulated faculty," *e.g. The Essenes, The Cæsars*, and *Cicero;* and, *thirdly*, that "far higher class of compositions" which might be considered as examples of a very rare kind of "impassioned prose," *e.g.* large portions of *The Confessions of an Opium-Eater* and the supplementary *Suspiria de Profundis*. This classification, though not quite the same as Bacon's division of the "parts of learning" (by which he meant "kinds of literature") into History or the Literature of Memory, Philosophy or the Literature of Reason, and Poetry or the Literature of Imagination, is practically equivalent. Hence, as Bacon's classification is the more scientific and searching, and also the most familiar and popular, we shall be pretty safe in adopting it, and dividing De Quincey's writings into: — (I.) Writings of Reminiscence, or Descriptive, Biographical, and Historical Writings; (II.) Speculative, Didactic, and Critical Writings; (III.) Imaginative Writings and Prose-Poetry. It is necessary, above all things, to premise that in De Quincey the three sorts of writing shade continually into each other. Where this

difficulty of the constant blending of kinds in one and the same paper is not met by the obvious preponderance of one of the kinds, it may be obviated by naming some papers in more divisions than one. With that understanding, we proceed to a classified synopsis of De Quincey's literary remains: —

I. DESCRIPTIVE, BIOGRAPHICAL, AND HISTORICAL

The writings of this class may be enumerated and subdivided as follows: —

I. AUTOBIOGRAPHIC: — Specially of this kind are *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and the *Autobiographic Sketches;* but autobiographic matter is dispersed through other papers.

II. BIOGRAPHIC SKETCHES OF PERSONS KNOWN TO THE AUTHOR: — Some such are included in the autobiographic writings; but distinct papers of the kind are *Recollections of the Lake Poets, or Sketches of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey*, and the articles entitled *Coleridge and Opium-Eating, Charles Lamb, Professor Wilson, Sir William Hamilton, Walking Stewart, Note on Hazlitt*, and *Dr. Parr, or Whiggism in its Relations to Literature.* All these papers are partly critical. Several papers of the same sort that appeared in magazines have not been reprinted in the Collective British Edition.

III. OTHER BIOGRAPHIC SKETCHES: — *Shakespeare* (in Vol. XV.), *Milton* (in Vol. X.), *Pope* (in Vol. XV.), *Richard Bentley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Marquis Wellesley, Last Days of Immanuel Kant* (a digest from the German), *Lessing, Herder, Goethe* (in Vol. XV.), *Schiller.* These also include criticism with biography.

IV. HISTORICAL SKETCHES AND DESCRIPTIONS: — *Homer and the Homeridæ, Philosophy of Herodotus, Toilette of the Hebrew Lady* (archæological), *The Cæsars* (in six chapters, forming the greater part of Vol IX.), *Charlemagne, Revolt of the Tartars, The Revolution of Greece, Modern Greece, Ceylon, China* (a little essay on the Chinese character, with illustrations), *Modern Superstition, Anecdotage, French and English Manners, Account of the Williams Murders* (the *postscript* to "Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts"). In the same sub-class we would include the two important papers entitled *Rhetoric* and *Style;* for, though to a considerable extent critical and didactic, they are, despite their titles, chiefly surveys of Literary History.

V. HISTORICAL SPECULATIONS AND RESEARCHES: — In this class may be included *Cicero, The Casuistry of Roman Meals, Greece under the Romans, Judas Iscariot, The Essenes, The Pagan Oracles, Secret Societies, Historico-Critical Inquiry into the Origin of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons, Ælius Lamia.*

The two Autobiographic volumes and the volume of Reminiscences of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey, are among the best known of De Quincey's writings. Among the other bio-

graphic sketches of persons known to him *Charles Lamb, Walking Stewart,* and *Dr. Parr* are those of the highest merit, — the last very severe and satirical, but full of interest and of marked ability. Of the other biographic sketches the ablest and most interesting by far is *Richard Bentley,* a really splendid specimen of biography in miniature. The Encyclopædia article on *Shakespeare,* though somewhat thin, deserves notice for the perfection of its proportions as a summary of what is essential in our information respecting Shakespeare's life. It is not yet superannuated. The similar article on *Pope* is interesting as an expression of De Quincey's generous admiration all in all of a poet whom he treats very severely in detail in some of his critical papers; and it is rare to meet so neat and workmanlike a little curiosity as the paper on *The Marquis Wellesley.* Of the personal sketches of eminent Germans, that entitled *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant,* though it is only a translated digest from a German original, bears the palm for delicious richness of anecdote and vividness of portraiture. De Quincey's credit in it, except in so far as he shaped and changed and infused life while translating (which was a practice of his), rests on the fact that he was drawn to the subject by his powerful interest in Kant's philosophy, and conceived the happy idea of such a mode of creating among his countrymen a personal affection for the great abstract thinker. Some of the other German sketches, especially *Lessing* and *Herder,* have the same special merit of being early and useful attempts to introduce some knowledge of German thought and literature into England; but the *Goethe,* on all accounts, is discreditable. It exhibits De Quincey at about his very worst; for, though raising the estimate of Goethe's genius that had been announced in the earlier critical paper on his "Wilhelm Meister," it retains something of the malice of that paper.

When we pass to the papers of historical description, it is hardly a surprise to find that it is De Quincey's tendency in such papers to run to disputed or momentous "points" and concentrate the attention on those. A magazine paper did not afford breadth of canvas enough for complete historical representation under such titles as he generally chose. No exception of the kind, indeed, can be taken to his *Revolt of the Tartars,* which is a noble effort of historical painting, done with a sweep and breadth of poetic imagination entitling it, though a history, to rank also among his prose-phantasies. Nor does the remark apply to the *Account of the Williams Murders,* which beats for ghastly power anything else

known in Newgate Calendar literature. But the tendency to "points" is shown in most of the other papers in the same subclass. Among these *The Philosophy of Herodotus* may be mentioned for its singularly fine appreciation of the Grecian father of History, and *Modern Greece* for its amusing and humorous instructiveness. *Rhetoric* and *Style* are among De Quincey's greatest performances; and, though in them too, considered as sketches of Literary History, the strength runs towards points and specialities, the titles declare that beforehand and indicate what the specialities are. *The Cæsars* is, undoubtedly, his most ambitious attempt, all in all, in the historical department; and he set great store by it himself; but it cannot, I think, take rank among his highest productions. There are striking passages and suggestions in it; but the general effect is too hazy, many of the parts are hurried, and none of the characters of the Emperors stands out with convincing distinctness after that of Julius Cæsar.

Few authors are so difficult to represent by mere extracts as De Quincey, so seldom does he complete a matter within a short space. The following, however, may pass as specimens of him in the descriptive and historical department. The second is excellent and memorable: —

First Sight of Dr. Parr

Nobody announced him; and we were left to collect his name from his dress and his conversation. Hence it happened that for some time I was disposed to question with myself whether this might not be Mr. Bobus even (little as it could be supposed to resemble *him*), rather than Dr. Parr, so much did he contradict all my rational preconceptions. "A man," said I, "who has insulted people so outrageously ought not to have done this in single reliance upon his professional protections: a brave man, and a man of honour, would here have carried about with him, in his manner and deportment, some such language as this, — 'Do not think that I shelter myself under my gown from the natural consequences of the affronts I offer: mortal combats I am forbidden, sir, as a Christian minister, to engage in; but, as I find it impossible to refrain from occasional license of tongue, I am very willing to fight a few rounds in a ring with any gentleman who fancies himself ill-used.'" Let me not be misunderstood; I do not contend that Dr. Parr should often, or regularly, have offered this species of satisfaction. But I *do* insist upon it, — that no man should have given the very highest sort of provocation so wantonly as Dr. Parr is recorded to have done, unless conscious that, in a last extremity, he was ready, like a brave man, to undertake a short turn-up, in a private room, with any person whatsoever whom he had insulted past endurance. A doctor who had so often tempted (which is a kind way of saying had *merited*) a cudgelling ought himself to have had some ability to cudgel. Dr. Johnson assuredly would have acted on that principle. Had volume

the second of that same folio with which he floored Osburn happened to lie ready to the prostrate man's grasp, nobody can suppose that Johnson would have disputed Osburn's right to retaliate; in which case a regular succession of rounds would have been established. Considerations such as these, and Dr. Parr's undeniable reputation (granted even by his most admiring biographers) as a sanguinary flagellator through his long career of pedagogue, had prepared me, — nay, entitled me, — to expect in Dr. Parr a huge carcase of a man, fourteen stone at the least. Hence, then, my surprise, and the perplexity I have recorded, when the door opened, and a little man, in a most plebeian wig, . . . cut his way through the company, and made for a *fauteuil* standing opposite the fire. Into this he *lunged;* and then forthwith, without preface or apology, began to open his talk upon the room. Here arose a new marvel, and a greater. If I had been scandalized at Dr. Parr's want of thews and bulk, conditions so indispensable for enacting the part of Sam Johnson, much more, and with better reason, was I now petrified with his voice, utterance, gestures, demeanour. Conceive, reader, by way of counterpoise to the fine classical pronunciation of Dr. Johnson, an infantine lisp, — the worst I ever heard, — from the lips of a man above sixty, and accompanied with all sorts of ridiculous grimaces and little stage gesticulations. As he sat in his chair, turning alternately to the right and to the left, that he might distribute his edification in equal proportions amongst us, he seemed the very image of a little French gossiping abbé. Yet all that I have mentioned was, and seemed to be, a trifle by comparison with the infinite pettiness of his matter. Nothing did he utter but little shreds of calumnious tattle, the most ineffably silly and frivolous of all that was then circulating in the Whig *salons* of London against the Regent. . . . He began precisely in these words: "Oh! I shall tell you" (laying a stress upon the word *shall*, which still further aided the resemblance to a Frenchman) "a sto-hee" (lispingly for story) "about the Pince Wegent" (such was his nearest approximation to *Prince Regent*). "Oh, the Pince Wegent! — the Pince Wegent! — what a sad Pince Wegent!" And so the old babbler went on, sometimes wringing his hands in lamentation, sometimes flourishing them with French grimaces and shrugs of shoulders, sometimes expanding and contracting his fingers like a fan. After an hour's twaddle of this scandalous description, suddenly he rose, and hopped out of the room, exclaiming all the way "*Oh, what a Pince! — Oh, what a Wegent! Is it a Wegent, is it a Pince, that you call this man? Oh, what a sad Pince! Did anybody ever hear of such a sad Pince! — such a sad Wegent — such a sad, sad Pince Wegent? Oh, what a Pince!*" &c., *da capo*. Not without indignation did I exclaim to myself, on this winding up of the scene, "And so this, then, this lithping slander-monger, and retailer of gossip fit rather for washerwomen over their tea than for scholars and statesmen, is the champion whom his party would propound as the adequate antagonist of Samuel Johnson! Faugh!" . . . Such was my first interview with Dr. Parr; such its issue. And now let me explain my drift in thus detailing its circumstances. Some people will say the drift was doubtless to exhibit Dr. Parr in a disadvantageous light, — as a petty gossiper and a man of mean personal appearance. No, by no means. Far from it. I, that write this paper, have myself a mean personal appearance; and I love men of mean appearance. . . . Dr. Parr, therefore, lost nothing in *my* esteem by showing a meanish exterior. Yet even this was worth mentioning, and had a value in reference to my present purpose. I like Dr. Parr; I may say even that I

love him, for some noble qualities of heart that really did belong to him, and were continually breaking out in the midst of his singular infirmities. But this, or a far nobler moral character than Dr. Parr's, can offer no excuse for giving a false elevation to his intellectual pretensions, and raising him to a level which he will be found incapable of keeping when the props of partial friendship are withdrawn. — *Works*, V. 36–43.

Summary View of the History of Greek Literature

There were two groups or clusters of Grecian wits, two deposits or stratifications of the national genius; and these were about a century apart. What makes them specially rememberable is the fact that each of these brilliant clusters had gathered separately about that man as their central pivot who even apart from this relation to the literature, was otherwise the leading spirit of his age. . . . Who were they? The one was Pericles, the other was Alexander of Macedon. Except Themistocles, who may be ranked as senior to Pericles by one generation (or thirty-three years), in the whole deduction of Grecian annals no other public man, statesman, captain-general, administrator of the national resources, can be mentioned as approaching to these two men in splendour of reputation, or even in real merit. Pisistratus was too far back; Alcibiades, who might (chronologically speaking) have been the son of Pericles, was too unsteady and (according to Mr. Coleridge's coinage) "unreliable," or perhaps, in more correct English, too "*unrely-uponable*." Thus far our purpose prospers. No man can pretend to forget two such centres as Pericles for the elder group, or Alexander of Macedon (the "strong he-goat" of Jewish prophecy) for the junior. Round these two *foci*, in two different but adjacent centuries, gathered the total starry heavens, the galaxy, the Pantheon of Grecian intellect . . . That we may still more severely search the relations in all points between the two systems, let us assign the chronological *locus* of each, because that will furnish another element towards the exact distribution of the chart representing the motion and the oscillations of human genius. Pericles had a very long administration. He was Prime Minister of Athens for upwards of one entire generation. He died in the year 429 before Christ, and in a very early stage of that great Peloponnesian war which was the one sole intestine war for Greece, affecting *every* nook and angle in the land. Now, in this long public life of Pericles, we are at liberty to fix on *any* year as his chronological *locus*. On good reasons, not called for in this place, we fix on the year 444 before Christ. This is too remarkable to be forgotten. *Four, four, four*, what in some games of cards is called a "*prial*" (we presume, by an elision of the first vowel, for *parial*) forms an era which no man can forget. It was the fifteenth year before the death of Pericles, and not far from the bisecting year of his political life. Now, passing to the other system, the *locus* of Alexander is quite as remarkable, as little liable to be forgotten when once indicated, and more easily determined, because selected from a narrower range of choice. The exact chronological *locus* of Alexander is 333 years before Christ. Everybody knows how brief was the career of this great man: it terminated in the year 323 before Christ. But the *annus mirabilis* [1] of his public life, the most effective and productive year throughout his oriental anabasis, was the year

[1] [Year of marvels.]

333 before Christ. Here we have another "*prial*," a prial of threes, for the *locus* of Alexander, if properly corrected. Thus far the elements are settled, the chronological longitude and latitude of the two great planetary systems into which the Greek literature breaks up and distributes itself: 444 and 333 are the two central years for the two systems; allowing, therefore, an interspace of 111 years between the *foci* of each. . . . Passing onwards from Pericles, you find that all the rest in *his* system were men in the highest sense creative, absolutely setting the very first example, each in his particular walk of composition; themselves without previous models, and yet destined every man of them to become models for all after-generations; themselves without fathers or mothers, and yet having all posterity for their children. First come the three men *divini spiritus*,[1] under a heavenly afflatus, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, the creators of Tragedy out of a village mummery; next comes Aristophanes, who breathed the breath of life into Comedy; then comes the great philosopher, Anaxagoras, who first theorized successfully on man and the world. Next come, whether great or not, the still more *famous* philosophers, Socrates, Plato, Xenophon; then comes, leaning upon Pericles, as sometimes Pericles leaned upon *him*, the divine artist, Phidias; and behind this immortal man walk Herodotus and Thucydides. What a procession to Eleusis would these men have formed! what a frieze, if some great artist could arrange it as dramatically as Chaucer has arranged the Pilgrimage to Canterbury! . . . Now, let us step on a hundred years forward. We are now within hail of Alexander, and a brilliant consistory of Grecian men that is by which *he* is surrounded. There are now exquisite masters of the more refined comedy; there are, again, great philosophers, for all the great schools are represented by able successors; and, above all others, there is the one philosopher who played with men's minds (according to Lord Bacon's comparison) as freely as ever his princely pupil with their persons, — there is Ar stotle. There are great orators; and, above all others, there is that orator whom succeeding generations (wisely or not) have adopted as the representative name for what is conceivable as oratorical perfection, — there is Demosthenes. Aristotle and Demosthenes are in themselves bulwarks of power; many hosts lie in those two names. For artists, again, to range against Phidias, there is Lysippus the sculptor, and there is Apelles the painter; for great captains and masters of strategic art, there is Alexander himself, with a glittering *cortége* of general officers, well qualified to wear the crowns which they will win, and to head the dynasties which they will found. Historians there are now, as in that former age; and, upon the whole, it cannot be denied that the "turnout" is showy and imposing. . . .

Before comparing the second "deposit" (geologically speaking) of Grecian genius with the first, let us consider what it was (if anything) that connected them. Here, reader, we would wish to put a question. Saving your presence, Did you ever see what is called a dumb-bell? *We* have; and know it by more painful evidence than that of sight. You, therefore, O reader! if personally cognizant of dumb-bells, we will remind, if not, we will inform, that it is a cylindrical bar of iron or lead, issuing at each end in a globe of the same metal, and usually it is sheathed in green baize. . . . Now, reader, it is under this image of the dumb-bell that we couch our allegory. Those globes at each end are the two systems or separate clusters of Greek

[1] [Of godlike mind.]

literature; and that cylinder which connects them is the long man that ran into each system, binding the two together. Who was that? It was Isocrates. *Great* we cannot call him in conscience; and therefore, by way of compromise, we call him *long*, which, in one sense, he certainly was; for he lived through four-and-twenty Olympiads, each containing four solar years. He narrowly escaped being a hundred years old; and, though that did not carry him from centre to centre, yet, as each system might be supposed to protend a radius each way of twenty years, he had, in fact, a full personal cognizance (and pretty equally) of the two systems, remote as they were, which composed the total world of Grecian genius. . . . Now then, reader, you have arrived at that station from which you overlook the whole of Greek literature, as a few explanations will soon convince you. Where is Homer? where is Hesiod? you ask; where is Pindar? Homer and Hesiod lived 1000 years B.C., or, by the lowest computation, near 900. For anything that we know, they may have lived with Tubal Cain. At all events, they belong to no power or agency that set in motion the age of Pericles, or that operated on that age. Pindar, again, was a solitary emanation of some unknown influences, at Thebes, more than five hundred years before Christ. He may be referred to the same age as Pythagoras. These are all that can be cited *before* Pericles. Next, for the ages *after* Alexander, it is certain that Greece Proper was so much broken in spirit by the loss of her autonomy, dating from that era, as never again to have rallied sufficiently to produce a single man of genius, — not one solitary writer who acted as a power upon the national mind. Callimachus was nobody, and not decidedly Grecian. Theocritus, a man of real genius in a limited way, is a Grecian in that sense only according to which an Anglo-American is an Englishman. Besides that, one swallow does not make a summer. Of any other writers, above all others of Menander, apparently a man of divine genius, we possess only a few wrecks; and of Anacreon, who must have been a poet of original power, we do not certainly know that we have even any wrecks. Of those which pass under his name not merely the authorship, but the era, is very questionable indeed. Plutarch and Lucian, the unlearned reader must understand, both belong to post-Christian ages. And, for all the Greek emigrants who may have written histories, such as we now value for their matter more than for their execution, one and all, they belong too much to Roman civilization that we should ever think of connecting them with native Greek literature. Polybius in the days of the second Scipio, Dion Cassius and Appian in the acmé of Roman civility, are no more Grecian authors because they wrote in Greek than the Emperors Marcus Antoninus and Julian were other than Romans because, from monstrous coxcombry, they chose to write in Greek their barren memoranda. — *Works*, X. 242–255.

It would be hopeless to seek to represent by extracts, even in this inadequate fashion, that very characteristic portion of De Quincey's writings of the generally historical kind which we have called his Historical Speculations and Researches. They must be read in their integrity. *The Casuistry of Roman Meals, Cicero, Judas Iscariot, The Essenes*, and *The Pagan Oracles*, may be especially recommended. They are admirable specimens of his boldness and acuteness in questioning received historical beliefs, and of his

ingenuity in working out novelties or paradoxes. The drift of *The Casuistry of Roman Meals* is that the Romans, and indeed the ancients generally, had no such regular meal early in the day as our modern breakfast, and that a whole coil of important social consequences depended on that one fact. In his *Cicero* he propounds a view of his own as to the character of the famous Roman orator and wit and his function in the struggle between Cæsar and Pompey. The paradox in *Judas Iscariot* is that Judas was not the vulgar traitor of the popular conception, but a headstrong fanatic, who, having missed the true spiritual purport of Christ's mission, and attached himself to Christ in the expectation of a political revolution to be effected by Christ's assumption of a temporal kingship or championship of the Jewish race, had determined to precipitate matters by leaving Christ no room for hesitation or delay. In *The Essenes* the attempt is to show that there was no real or independent sect of that name among the Jews, all the confusion to the contrary having originated in a rascally invention of the historian Josephus. In *The Pagan Oracles* there is a contradiction of the tradition of a sudden paralysis of the Pagan ritual on the first appearance of Christianity, and a castigation of the early Christian writers for having invented the pious lie.

II. SPECULATIVE, DIDACTIC, AND CRITICAL

While a speculative and critical element is discernible in almost all the papers now dismissed as in the main biographical or historical, and while some of the historical papers were regarded by De Quincey himself as typical examples of the speculative essay, it is of a different set of his papers that our classification obliges us to take account under the present heading. They also fall into subdivisions: —

I. METAPHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL: — In this subdivision, itself composite, but answering to what passes under the name of PHILOSOPHY in a general sense, may be included the following: — *System of the Heavens as revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes;* various papers or portions of papers relating to Kant, *e.g.* part of the *Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been neglected*, the paper entitled *Kant in his Miscellaneous Essays*, and the translation of Kant's *Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmopolitical Plan;* the scraps entitled *Dreaming* and *The Palimpsest of the Human Brain*, in the "Sequel to the Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" (Vol. XVI.); some of the scraps in the "Notes from the Pocket-Book of a Late Opium-Eater," *e.g. On Suicide;* and the articles entitled *Plato's*

Republic, Glance at the Works of Mackintosh, Casuistry, On War, National Temperance Movements, Presence of Mind, and *The Juggernaut of Social Life.*

II. THEOLOGICAL: — *Protestantism, Miracles as Subjects of Testimony, On Christianity as an Organ of Political Movement,* and *Memorial Chronology on a new and more apprehensible system.* This last, included in Vol XVI., is an unfinished paper, posthumously published from the author's manuscript; and it contains little more than a clever and humorous introduction, in the form of an address to a young lady, with the beginning of what was intended to be a piece of Biblical Criticism.

III. ENGLISH POLITICS: — *A Tory's Account of Toryism, Whiggism, and Radicalism; On the Political Parties of Modern England; Falsification of English History.*

IV. POLITICAL ECONOMY: — *Logic of Political Economy; Dialogues of Three Templars on Political Economy;* the scraps entitled *Malthus* and *Measure of Value* in the "Notes from the Pocket-Book of a Late Opium-Eater"; and the article entitled *California.*

V. LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM: — The large essays entitled *Rhetoric* and *Style* may be here noted again; and there may be associated with them, as expositions of general literary theory, the *Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been neglected,* and the article entitled *Language* (which, despite the title, is really on Style). The more special articles of the same sort form a numerous series. Arranged in the chronological order of their subjects, they are as follows: — *Theory of Greek Tragedy, The Antigone of Sophocles,* and *The Theban Sphinx; On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth;* the short critical paper entitled *Milton* (in Vol. VI.), and the other entitled *Milton versus Southey and Landor* (in Vol. XI.); the review entitled *Schlosser's Literary History of the Eighteenth Century;* the two critical articles on Pope, entitled *Alexander Pope* (in Vol. VIII.) and *Lord Carlisle on Pope* (in Vol. XII.); the article *Oliver Goldsmith* (slightly biographical, but chiefly critical); the paper on Carlyle's Translation of Wilhelm Meister, reprinted under the title *Goethe Reflected in his Novel of Wilhelm Meister,* with omission of the remarks on the translator (in Vol. XII.); the sketch *John Paul Frederick Richter,* prefixed to the translated "Analects from Richter" (in Vol. XIII.); the essay *On Wordsworth's Poetry;* the *Notes on Godwin and Foster,* the slight little paper entitled *John Keats,* and the *Notes on Walter Savage Landor.* To these may be added *Orthographic Mutineers, The Art of Conversation,* the scrap *Walladmor,* and one or two of the scraps called "Notes from the Pocket-Book of a Late Opium-Eater."

To the harder varieties of speculative Philosophy, it will be observed, De Quincey has contributed less of an original kind than might have been expected from his known private passion for metaphysical studies. If we except his *System of the Heavens,* which hints metaphysical ideas in the form of a splendid cosmological vision, and his *Palimpsest of the Human Brain,* which is full of psychological suggestion, he seems to have satisfied himself in this department by reports from Kant and recommendations of Kant to English attention. The accuracy of some of his statements about Kant, and indeed of his knowledge of Kant, has been called in

question of late; but it remains to his credit that, in a singularly bleak and vapid period of the native British philosophizing, he had contracted such an admiration, all in all, for the great German transcendentalist. His translation of Kant's *Idea of a Universal History* was a feat in itself. That essay remains to this day the clearest argument for the possibility of a Science of History since Vico propounded the *Scienza Nuova;* and to have perceived the importance of such an essay in the year 1824 was to be in possession of a philosophical notion of great value long before it was popular in Britain. That De Quincey contented himself so much with mere accounts of Kant personally, and literary glimpses of the nature of his speculations, may have been due to the fact that original philosophizing of the metaphysical and psychological kinds was not wanted in magazines and would not pay. He made amends, however, as our list will have shown, by a considerable quantity of writing on subjects of Speculative Ethics. His best essay of this kind is that entitled *Casuistry*. It was a favourite idea of De Quincey's that Moral Philosophy in recent times, especially in Protestant countries, has run too much upon generalities, avoiding too much those very *cases* of constant recurrence in life about which difficulties are likely to arise in practical conduct. Accordingly, in this essay, there is a discussion of duelling and the laws of honour, the legitimacy of suicide, proper behaviour to servants, the limits of the rule of veracity, &c., &c., all with lively historical illustrations. In the paper *On War* the necessary permanence of that agency in the world is asserted strongly, and a certain character of nobleness and beneficence claimed for it. There is less of dissent from current philanthropy in the article on *Temperance Movements;* but it will not give entire satisfaction. The article on *Plato's Republic* is a virulent attack upon a philosopher towards whom we should have expected to see De Quincey standing in an attitude of discipleship and veneration. This is owing chiefly to De Quincey's disgust with the moral heresies, in the matter of marriage and the like, on which Plato so coolly professes to found his imaginary commonwealth; and it is possible that, had he been treating Plato in respect of the sum-total of his philosophic and literary merits, we should have had a much more admiring estimate. As it is, one has to pity De Quincey rather than Plato in this unfortunate interview. He looks as petulant and small in his attack on Plato as he did in his attack on Goethe.

The expressly theological papers of De Quincey, with passages

innumerable through his other writings, show that he took his stand on established Christian orthodoxy. He avowed his belief in a miraculous revelation from God to mankind, begun and continued in the history of the Jewish race, and consummated in the life of Christ and in the diffusion of Christianity by the Apostles. As a reasoned piece of Christian apologetics his answer to Hume's argument, entitled *Miracles as Subjects of Testimony*, does not seem to have won much regard from theologians, and, though very subtle, is certainly deficient in the homely quality which Hobbes called *bite*. His own religious faith, indeed, appears to have been very much of the nature of an inherited sentiment, independent of reasoning, and which he would not let reasoning disturb. In one respect, too, his theology was of what many theologians now would call a narrow and old-fashioned kind. There is no trace in him of that notion of a universal religious inspiration among the nations, and so of a certain respectability, greater or less, in all mythologies, which has been fostered by the modern science of religions. On the contrary, Christianity is with him the single divine revelation in the world, and he thinks and speaks of the Pagan religions, in the style of the old-fashioned theology, as simply false religions, horrid religions, inventions of the spirit of evil. How this is to be reconciled with his wide range of historical sympathy, and especially with his admiration of the achievements of the Greek intellect and the grandeur of the Roman character, it might be difficult to say. Probably it was because he distinguished between those noble and admirable developments which human nature could work out for itself, and which therefore belong to humanity as such, and the more rare and spiritual possibilities which he believed actual revelation had woven into the web of humanity, and which were to be regarded as gifts from the supernatural. At all events, the matter stands as has been stated. In the same way, Mahometanism figures in his regard as of little worth, monotheistic certainly and therefore superior to the Pagan creeds, but a spurious religion and partly stolen. Further, De Quincey's Christianity declares itself as deliberately of the Protestant species. With much respect for Roman Catholicism, he yet repudiates it as in great measure a corruption of the original system, which original system he finds reproduced in the Protestantism of the sixteenth century. His article entitled *Protestantism* is an exposition of his views in that matter, and is altogether a very able and important paper. If

he has seemed narrow hitherto in his philosophy of religion, here, once within the bounds of his Protestantism, and engaged in defining Protestantism, he becomes broad enough. "The self-sufficingness of the Bible and the right of private judgment" are, he maintains, "the two great characters in which Protestantism commences," and the doctrines by which it distinguishes itself from the Church of Rome. Bound up in these doctrines, he maintains, is the duty of absolute religious toleration; and by this principle of absolute religious toleration, the right of the individual to think, print, and publish what he pleases, he abides with exemplary fidelity through all his writings, even while in skirmish with the free-thinkers for whom he has the strongest personal disgust. But this is not all. He abjures *Bibliolatry*, or that kind of respect for the letter of the Bible which is founded on the notion of verbal inspiration, denying it to be a necessary tenet of Protestantism, or to be possible indeed for any scholarly understanding. It is not only, he maintains, that the notion of literal or verbal inspiration is broken down at once by recollection of the corruptions of the original text of the Scriptures, their various readings, and the fact that it is only in translations that the Scriptures exist for the masses of mankind in all countries. He addresses himself more emphatically to the alleged palpable errors in the substance and teachings of the Bible, its violations of history and chronology, its inconsistencies with modern science. Here he refuses at once that method of reconciling science with Scripture which proceeds by torture of texts into meanings different from those which they bore to the Hebrews or the Greeks who first read them. His bold principle is that Science and the Bible cannot be reconciled in such matters, and that the desire to reconcile them indicates a most gross and carnal misconception of the very idea of a divine revelation. The principle may be given in his own words: —

> It is an obligation resting upon the Bible, if it is to be consistent with itself, that it should *refuse* to teach science; and, if the Bible ever *had* taught any one art, science, or process of life, it would have been asked, Is a divine mission abandoned suddenly for a human mission? By what caprice is this one science taught, and others not? Or these two, suppose, and not all? But an objection even deadlier would have followed. It is clear as is the purpose of daylight that the whole body of the arts and sciences comprises one vast machinery for the irritation and development of the human intellect. For this end they exist. To see God, therefore, descending into the arena of science, and contending, as it were, for his own prizes, by teaching science

in the Bible, would be to see him intercepting from their self-evident destination (viz., man's intellectual benefit) his own problems by solving them himself. No spectacle could more dishonour the divine idea, could more injure man under the mask of aiding him. *The Bible must not teach anything that man can teach himself.*

The revelation of the Old and New Testaments is to be regarded, then, according to De Quincey, as a leaven of truths purely moral and spiritual, sent into the world by miracle precisely because man could never have found them out for himself, with a careful abstinence from any mixture of matter of ordinary knowledge in advance of what was already existent, and therefore with an adoption of all existing historical and scientific phrases and traditions. Hence *Bibliolatry*, in the sense of a belief in the immaculate correctness of the language and statements of the Bible on all subjects whatsoever, was no tenet of genuine Christianity, secure as every Christian ought to be that, whatever changes of conception on such subjects as the antiquity of the human race, or the system of the physical universe, might come with the progress of the human intelligence, the supernatural leaven would impregnate them as they came, and go on working. In this doctrine, of which De Quincey seems to have meditated a particular application in his unfinished papers entitled "*Memorial Chronology*," he was substantially at one with Coleridge and Wordsworth. He was at one with them, too, in his affection for Church-Establishments. In remarkable difference from his favourite Milton, who regarded the incorporation of Church and State as the cause of the vitiation of the supernatural leaven in the world, and scowled back with hatred on the Emperor Constantine as the beginner of that mischief, De Quincey confessed to a special kindness for Constantine, precisely because that Emperor had conceived the idea of converting Christianity into a political agency. It was Constantine who had carried Christian teaching into effect in such institutions as hospitals and public provision for the poor; and the prospects of the world for the future were bound up with the possible extensions of the political influence of Christianity in similar directions. That is the subject of the essay entitled *On Christianity as an Organ of Political Movement.* In short, De Quincey is to be remembered, in his religious relations, as a staunch Church-of-England man of the broad school, not given to High-Church sacerdotalism, though with an æsthetic liking in his own case for a comely ritual.

In politics De Quincey was an English Tory. In the two papers entitled *A Tory's Account of Toryism, Whiggism, and Radicalism*, and *On the Political Parties of Modern England*, he avows his partisanship. Toryism asserts itself also in the article on Dr. Parr, and tinges some of the other papers. It is interesting, indeed, to observe how much of the "John Bull element," as Mr. Page calls it, there was, all in all, in the feeble little man. His patriotism was of the old type of the days of Pitt and Nelson. He exulted in the historic glories of England and her imperial ascendency in so many parts of the globe, and would have had her do battle for any punctilio of honour, as readily as for any more visible interest, in her dealings with foreigners. He had a good deal of the old English anti-Gallican prejudice; and, though he has done justice, over and over again, to some of the finer characteristics of the French, the total effect of his remarks on the French, politically and intellectually, is irritating to the admirers of that great nation. He knew them only through books or by casual observation of stray Frenchmen he met; for he was never out of the British Islands, and never experienced that sudden awakening of a positive affection for the French which comes infallibly from even a single visit to their lightsome capital. On the other hand, though Scotland was his home for so large a part of his life, he seems never to have contracted the least sympathy with anything distinctively Scottish. Even his Toryism was specially English or South-British. But, like all other parts of his creed, his Toryism was of a highly intellectual kind, with features of its own. In such questions, for example, as that of the continuance of flogging and other brutal forms of punishment in the army and navy and elsewhere, he parted company with the ordinary mass of Tories, leaving his curse with them in that particular, and went with the current of Radical sentiment and opinion. How far he was carried, by his candour of intellect and depth and accuracy of scholarship, from the ordinary rut of party commonplace, may be judged also from his little paper entitled *Falsification of English History*. It is a gallant little paper, and one of the best rebukes in our language to that systematic vilification of the Puritan Revolution, the English Commonwealth, and the Reign of Cromwell, which has come down in the Anglican mind as an inheritance from the Restoration, and still vulgarizes so much of our scholarship and our literature.

The *Dialogues of the Three Templars* and the *Logic of Political*

Economy are De Quincey's chief contributions to the literature of Economic Science. As to the literary deftness of the essay and the treatise there is no doubt. For cutting lucidity of exposition and beauty of style they are to be envied by most writers on Political Economy. This seems to have been felt by Mr. John Stuart Mill, who mentions De Quincey with respect, and uses quotations from him thankfully, in parts of his standard work. The question rather is whether De Quincey has any title, such as he himself seemed to claim, to the character of an original thinker in the matter of the science. Mr. Mill's language in one place appears to negative this claim, though very gently; and the question has been reopened, in De Quincey's interest, by Mr. Shadworth Hodgson in an essay entitled "De Quincey as Political Economist." Enough here on that matter.

If De Quincey surpasses himself anywhere in his didactic papers, it is in those that concern Literary Theory and Criticism. No English writer has left a finer body of disquisition on the science and principles of Literature than will be found in De Quincey's general papers entitled *Rhetoric*, *Style*, and *Language*, and his *Letters to a Young Man*, together with his more particular articles entitled *Theory of Greek Tragedy*, *The Antigone of Sophocles*, *Milton*, *Milton versus Southey and Landor*, *Alexander Pope*, *Lord Carlisle on Pope*, *Schlosser's Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, and *On Wordsworth's Poetry*. There, or elsewhere, in De Quincey, will be found the last word, so far as there can be a last word, on some of the most important questions of style or literary art, and a treatment of literary questions throwing back into mere obsolete ineptitude the literary theories of such masters of the eighteenth century as Addison and Johnson, and of such of their successors as the acute Jeffrey and the robust but coarse-grained Whately. Goethe, the greatest literary critic that ever lived, was more comprehensive and universally tolerant; but De Quincey was *facile princeps*,[1] to the extent of his touch, among the English critics of his generation. He acknowledged that he had received some of his leading ideas in literary art from Wordsworth originally; but whatever he derived from Wordsworth was matured by so much independent reflection, and so modified by the peculiarities of his own temperament, that the result was a system of precepts differing from Wordsworth's in not a few points.

[1] [Easily the chief.]

One of the best known of De Quincey's critical maxims is his distinction, after Wordsworth, between the Literature of Knowledge, which he would call Literature only by courtesy, and the Literature of Power, which alone he regarded as Literature proper. My belief is that the distinction has been overworked in the form in which De Quincey put it forth, and that it would require a great deal of reëxplication and modification to bring it into defensible and permanent shape. As it would be unpardonable, however, to omit this De Quinceyism in a sketch of De Quincey's opinions, here is one of the passages in which he expounds it: —

THE LITERATURE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE LITERATURE OF POWER

In that great social organ which, collectively, we call Literature, there may be distinguished two separate offices that may blend and often do so, but capable, severally, of a severe insulation, and naturally fitted for reciprocal repulsion. There is, first, the literature of *knowledge*, and, secondly, the literature of *power*. The function of the first is to *teach;* the function of the second is to *move:* the first is a rudder, the second an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the *mere* discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy. Remotely, it may travel towards an object seated in what Lord Bacon calls *dry* light; but, proximately, it does and must operate, else it ceases to be a literature of *power*, in and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering iris of human passions, desires, and genial emotions. Men have so little reflected on the higher functions of literature as to find it a paradox if one should describe it as a mean or subordinate purpose of books to give information. But this is a paradox only in the sense which makes it honourable to be paradoxical. Whenever we talk in ordinary language of seeking information or gaining knowledge, we understand the words as connected with something of absolute novelty. But it is the grandeur of all truth which *can* occupy a very high place in human interests that it is never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds: it exists eternally by way of germ or latent principle in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed, but never to be planted. To be capable of transplantation is the immediate criterion of a truth that ranges on a lower scale. Besides which, there is a rarer thing than truth, — namely, *power*, or deep sympathy with truth. . . . Were it not that human sensibilities are ventilated and continually called out into exercise by the great phenomena of infancy, or of real life as it moves through chance and change, or of literature as it recombines these elements in the mimicries of poetry, romance, &c., it is certain that, like any animal power or muscular energy falling into disuse, all such sensibilities would gradually drop and dwindle. It is in relation to these great *moral* capacities of man that the literature of power, as contradistinguished from that of knowledge, lives and has its field of action. It is concerned with what is highest in man; for the Scriptures themselves never condescended to deal, by suggestion or coöperation, with the mere discursive understanding: when speaking of man in his intellectual capacity, the Scrip-

tures speak not of the understanding, but of "*the understanding heart*," — making the heart, *i.e.* the great intuitive (or non-discursive) organ, to be the interchangeable formula for man in his highest state of capacity for the infinite. Tragedy, romance, fairy tale, or epopee, all alike restore to man's mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution, which else (left to the support of daily life in its realities) would languish for want of sufficient illustration. . . . Hence the preëminency over all authors that merely *teach* of the meanest that *moves*, or that teaches, if at all, indirectly by moving. The very highest work that has ever existed in the literature of knowledge is but a *provisional* work, a book upon trial and sufferance, and *quamdiu bene se gesserit*.[1] Let its teaching be even partially revised, let it be but expanded, nay, let its teaching be but placed in a better order, and instantly it is superseded. Whereas the feeblest works in the literature of power, surviving at all, survive as finished and unalterable amongst men. For instance, the *Principia* of Sir Isaac Newton was a book *militant* on earth from the first. In all stages of its progress it would have to fight for its existence, — first, as regards absolute truth; secondly, when that combat was over, as regards its form or mode of presenting the truth. And, as soon as a La Place, or anybody else, builds higher upon the foundations laid by this book, effectually he throws it out of the sunshine into decay and darkness; by weapons even from this book he superannuates and destroys this book, so that soon the name of Newton remains as a mere *nominis umbra*,[2] but his book, as a living power, has transmigrated into other forms. Now, on the contrary, the *Iliad*, the *Prometheus* of Æschylus, the *Othello* or *King Lear*, the *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, or the *Paradise Lost*, are not militant, but triumphant forever, as long as the languages exist in which they speak or can be taught to speak. They never *can* transmigrate into new incarnations. To reproduce *them* in new forms or variations, even if in some things they should be improved, would be to plagiarize. A good steam-engine is properly superseded by a better. But one lovely pastoral valley is not superseded by another, nor a statue of Praxiteles by a statue of Michael Angelo. — *Works*, viii. 5–9.

III. IMAGINATIVE WRITINGS AND PROSE POETRY

In this class may be reckoned the following: —

I. HUMOROUS EXTRAVAGANZAS: — The paragon in this kind is, of course, *Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts*. There are, however, occasional passages of frolicsome invention through the other papers; and the entire paper *Sortilege and Astrology* may be taken as a *jeu d'esprit* of the same sort.

II. INCIDENTS OF REAL LIFE AND PASSAGES OF HISTORY TREATED IMAGINATIVELY: — In addition to the poetic versions of incidents from real life that are interwrought with the expressly autobiographic writings, there ought to be mentioned specially the paper entitled *Early Memorials of Grasmere*. It is the story of the loss of two peasants, a husband and his wife, among the hills, during a snowstorm in the Lake District, in the year 1807. In the same group, on grounds of literary principle, may be reckoned the

[1] [During good behaviour, — as long as it shall conduct itself well.]

[2] [The shadow of a name.]

story called *The Spanish Military Nun* and the paper entitled *Joan of Arc*. As has been already hinted, *The Revolt of the Tartars* might rank in the same high company.

III. Novelettes and Romances: — Chief among these is De Quincey's one-volume novel or romance, *Klosterheim*, published in 1832, and unfortunately not included in the edition of his collected works, nor accessible at present in any form, to any of her Majesty's subjects, except by importation of an American reprint. In connection with this independent attempt in prose-fiction, we may remember the short story or novelette called *The Avenger* (reprinted in Vol. XVI. from *Blackwood's Magazine* of 1838) and *Walladmor*, the pseudo-Waverley Novel of 1824, which De Quincey translated from the German. There are, besides, some novelettes from the German, reprinted in the collective edition.

IV. Prose Phantasies and Lyrics: — Although De Quincey ranked the whole of his *Confessions* as properly an example of that "mode of impassioned prose" in which he thought there had been few or no precedents in English, it is enough here to remember those parts of the *Confessions* which may be distinguished as "dream phantasies." To be added, under our present heading (besides passages in the *Autobiographic Sketches*), are *The Daughter of Lebanon*, the extraordinary paper in three parts called *The English Mail Coach*, and the little cluster of fragments called *Suspiria de Profundis* (*i.e.* "Sighs from the Depths"), *being a Sequel to the Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. In fact, however, only three of the six fragments there gathered under the common name of "Suspiria" are either "lyrics" or "phantasies," the rest being critical or psychological. The three entitled to a place here are those entitled *Levana and our Ladies of Sorrow*, *Savannah-la-Mar*, and *Memorial Suspiria*.

The celebrity of the essay *On Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts* is not surprising. The ghastly originality of the conception, the humorous irony with which it is sustained by stroke after stroke, and the mad frenzy of the closing scene, where the assembled club of amateurs in murder, with Toad-in-the-hole leading them, drink their toasts, and sing their chorus in honour of certain superlative specimens of their favourite art, leave an impression altogether exceptional, as of pleasure mixed illegitimately with the forbidden and horrible. For a lighter and more genial specimen of De Quincey in his whimsical vein, *Sortilege and Astrology* may be cordially recommended. To pass from such papers to *Early Memorials of Grasmere*, *The Spanish Military Nun*, and *Joan of Arc*, gives one a fresh idea of the versatility of his powers. The first, describing winter among the English Lakes, and telling the tragic story of George and Sarah Green, and of the bravery of their little girl left in charge of the cottage to which they were never to return alive, has all the mournful beauty of a commemorative prose-poem. The second, which

is a narrative, from historical materials, of the adventures of a daring Spanish girl, in man's disguise, first in Spain and then in the Spanish parts of the new world, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, is in De Quincey's most characteristic style of mingled humour and earnestness, and has all the fascination of one of the best of the Spanish *picaresque* romances. The paper on Joan of Arc, though brief, is nobly perfect. "What is to be thought of *her?* What is to be thought of the poor shepherd girl from the hills and forests of Lorraine, that, like the Hebrew shepherd boy from the hills and forests of Judea, rose suddenly out of the quiet, out of the safety, out of the religious inspiration, rooted in deep pastoral solitudes, to a station in the van of armies, and to the more perilous station at the right hand of kings?" Opening in this strain of poetic solemnity, the paper maintains the same high tone throughout; and, if it does not leave the question answered by enshrining the image of the Maid of Orleans in a sufficient vision of glory, there is no such answer in the English language.

De Quincey included in his collected works two short tales of clever humour, called *The Incognito, or Count Fitzhum*, and *The King of Hayti*, and a third, called *The Dice*, a short story of devilry and black art, describing the first as "translated from the German of Dr. Schultze," and the other two merely as "from the German." Passing these and a fourth tale, called *The Fatal Marksman*, which is somewhat in the style of the third, and seems also to be from the German (though that is not stated), we have, as the single original novelette of De Quincey among the collected works, the strange piece called *The Avenger*. It is a story, wholly fantastic and sensational, but quite in De Quincey's vein, of a series of appalling and mysterious murders supposed to happen in a German town in the year 1816, and of the astounding discovery at last that they have all been the work of a certain magnificent youth, Maximilian Wyndham, of mixed English and Jewish descent, and of immense wealth, who had come to reside in the town, in the house of one of the University professors, with high Russian credentials and universal acceptance among the citizens. He had come thither nominally to complete his studies but really in pursuit of a secret scheme of vengeance upon those of the inhabitants who had been concerned in certain deadly injuries and dishonours done to his family, and especially to his Jewish mother. The story does not appear to have been much

read; and admirers of De Quincey may judge from this description of it whether it is worth looking up. It may be even more necessary to give some account of *Klosterheim, or the Masque.*

As originally published by Blackwood in 1832, it was a small prettily-printed volume of 305 pages, without De Quincey's name after the title, but only the words "By the English Opium-Eater." It would make about half a volume in the collective edition of the works, were it included there.

The scene of the story is an imaginary German city, Klosterheim, with its forest-neighbourhood; and the time is the winter of 1633, with part of the year 1634, or just at that point of the great Thirty Years' War when, after the death of Gustavus-Adolphus, his Swedish generals are maintaining the war against the Imperialists, and all Germany is in confusion and misery with the marchings and counter-marchings, the ravagings and counter-ravagings, of the opposed armies. The Klosterheimers, as good Catholics, are mainly in sympathy with the Imperialists, but are in the peculiar predicament of being subject to a gloomy and tyrannical Landgrave, who, though a bigoted Roman Catholic, has reasons of his own for cultivating the Swedish alliance, and is in fact in correspondence with the Swedes. A leading spirit among them, and especially among the University students, is a certain splendid soldier-youth, Maximilian, a stranger from a distance. So, when the Klosterheimers are in excitement over the approach to their city, through the forest, of a travelling mass of pilgrims, under Imperialist convoy, all the way from Vienna, and over the chances that the poor pilgrims may be attacked and cut to pieces by a certain brutal Holkerstein, the head of a host of marauders who prowl through the forest, who but this Maximilian is the man to execute the general desire of Klosterheim by evading the orders of the cruel Landgrave and carrying armed aid to the pilgrims? Well that he has done so; for in the midst of the pilgrim-cavalcade, and the chief personage in it, is his own lady-love, the noble Paulina, a relative of the Emperor, and intrusted by him with despatches. The lovers meet; and, save for a night-alarm, in the course of which the portmanteau of secret despatches is abstracted by robbers from Lady Paulina's carriage, there is no accident till the pilgrims are close to Klosterheim. There, in the night-time, Holkerstein and his host of marauders do fall upon them. There is a dreadful night-battle; and, though the marauding host is beaten off, chiefly by the heroic

valour of Maximilian, it is but a wreck of the pilgrim-army that enters Klosterheim on the morrow, — and then alas! without Maximilian among them. He has been carried away by the marauders, a wounded prisoner. The residue of the poor pilgrims are dispersed through the city somehow for hospitality, and the doleful Lady Paulina takes up her abode in the great abbey, close to the Landgrave's palace. Then, for a while, we are among the Klosterheimers, and called upon to pity them. For the gloomy Landgrave, always a tyrant, now revels in acts of tyranny and cruelty utterly indiscriminate and capricious, maddened by the goad of some new motive, which is not explained, but which we connect with intelligence he has obtained from the abstracted imperial despatches. There are arrests of students and citizens; all are in consternation; no one knows what will happen next. Suddenly, however, a counter-agency is at work in Klosterheim, baffling and bewildering the Landgrave and his wily Italian minister Adorni. This is a certain mysterious being, whether human or supernatural no one can tell, who calls himself "The Masque," and seems omnipresent and resistless. He appears when and where he likes, passes through bolts and bars, leaves messages to the Landgrave nailed up in public places, and defies his police. Houses are entered; citizens disappear, sometimes with signs of scuffle and bloodshed left in their rooms; and, as these victims of "The Masque" are not exclusively from the ranks of the Landgrave's partisans, it becomes doubtful whether the mysterious being has any political purpose, or is a mere demon of general malignity. But, evidently, the Landgrave is his main mark; and it is in the palace of the Landgrave that he makes his presence and his power most daringly felt. How, for example, he appeared there at a great masked ball, to which exactly twelve hundred persons had been invited by numbered tickets; how, when the twelve hundred had been, by arrangement, counted off in the hall, and aggregated apart, he was seen in majestic and solitary composure, leaning against a marble column, and it seemed as if the Landgrave and Adorni had but to give the word to their myrmidons to clutch him; but how there was nothing of that expected catastrophe, but only a scornful disappearance of the awful figure, as if in cloud or smoke, after some words from his hollow voice which left the Landgrave trembling: — for all this, and much more, there must be application inside the little volume itself. In reading it, you are as if in the heart of one of Mrs.

Radcliffe's novels, with the usual paraphernalia of cloaks, nodding plumes, ghostly sounds, labyrinthine corridors and secret passages, pictures of ancestors on the walls, and the rest of it; and you long to be out of such a curiosity shop of jumbled incredibilities, and to know the *dénouement*. That does not come till after new episodes of danger to Lady Paulina, new coils of marvel round the mysterious "Masque," and a second great assembly in the palace, with a vast mechanism of new preparations by the infuriated Landgrave for the discomfiture of his adversary. Let these be supposed; and let it be supposed that the 6th of September, 1634, has passed, and that the Swedes have been routed and the Imperialists triumphant in the great battle of Nördlingen. What need then for further mystery? The hour has come for that revolution in Klosterheim which the Emperor himself had devised from Vienna, and manipulated in the secret despatches he had sent by the Lady Paulina. All is revealed in a crash. Maximilian is the true Landgrave, the hitherto undivulged son of the last good Landgrave; and the present usurper had come to his power by the murder of Maximilian's father, and maintained it by other crimes. In the crash of this revelation the gloomy usurper sinks, the last blow to the wretched man being the death of his daughter by a mistake of his own murderous order for the execution of the Lady Paulina. Maximilian marries Paulina; there are other more minute solutions and surprises; and the Klosterheimers, under their new Landgrave, are again a happy people. But who was the mysterious "Masque"? Who but Maximilian himself? Trap-doors and subterranean passages, his own dexterity, and collusion with the requisite number of citizens and students, and with an old seneschal of the tyrant, had done the whole business; and the only blood really shed in the course of it had been that of the poor seneschal, betrayed by accident, and stabbed by his master.

Such is De Quincey's one-volume romance, a poor performance, doubtless for the sake of a little money, about the time when he settled in Edinburgh. Was he ashamed of it afterwards, that he did not reprint it? There was no necessity for that; for, though the story does not show the craft of a Sir Walter Scott, it is by no means bad of its preposterous kind. The style, at all events, is remarkably careful, with a marble beauty of sentence that makes one linger as one reads.

There remains to be noticed, in the last place, that very special

portion of De Quincey's writings of the imaginative order for which he claimed distinction above the rest, as illustrating "a mode of impassioned prose" but slightly represented before in English Literature. It may be questioned, however, whether the pieces for which he claimed this distinction are described most exactly by the phrase "impassioned prose." Their peculiarity is not so much that they are impassioned in any ordinary sense as that they are imaginative or poetical after a very definite and rather rare sort. It was one of the distinctions of De Quincey's intellect that it could pass from that ordinary or discursive exercise of itself which consists in expounding, reasoning, or investigating, to that poetic exercise of itself which consists in the formation of visions or phantasies; and it did, in fact, so pass on those occasions more particularly when it was moved by pathos or by the feeling of the mysterious and awful. What is most observable, therefore, in the pieces under notice is that they exhibit the operation of those two constitutional kinds of emotion upon De Quincey's *intellectual* activity, transmuting it from the common or discursive mode to that called poetic imagination. Inasmuch as it is the implicated feeling or sentiment that moves the intellectual process, and inasmuch as there are marks of this in the rhythmical or lyrical character of the result, there is no great harm in calling that result impassioned prose, especially if we keep to the limitation stipulated by De Quincey's own phrase, "*a mode of* impassioned prose"; but it is better, all in all, to define the writings under consideration as examples of a peculiar "mode of imaginative prose," and, if further definition is wanted of this peculiar mode of prose poetry, to call it *Prose Phantasy and Lyric*, or *Lyrical Prose Phantasy*. De Quincey was consciously and deliberately an artist in this form of prose-poetry, and has left specimens of it that have very few parallels in English. One ought to remember, however, how much he must have been influenced by the previous example of Jean Paul Richter. Of his admiration of the famous German before he had himself begun his career of literature there is proof in his article on Richter published in the *London Magazine* in December, 1821, just after the appearance of his *Confessions* in their first form in the same Magazine; and one observes that among the translated "analects" from Richter which accompanied or followed that article, and were intended to introduce Richter to the English public, were *The Happy Life of a Parish Priest in Sweden* and the *Dream*

upon the Universe, both of them specimens of Richter's peculiar art of prose-phantasy. There can be no doubt that Richter's example in such pieces influenced De Quincey permanently. But, though he may have learnt something from Richter, he was an original master in the same art.

One might go back here on his *Joan of Arc*, and some of the other writings of which account has been already taken, and claim for them, or for parts of them, fresh recognition in our present connection. But let us confine ourselves to the writings to which De Quincey seems to have pointed more especially, and which have been already enumerated.

To the famous passages of "dream-phantasy" in the *Opium Confessions* we need not readvert farther than to say that, extraordinary as they are as a whole, one may fairly object to parts of them, as to some of the similar dream-phantasies in Richter, that they fail by too much obtrusion of artistic self-consciousness in their construction, and sometimes also by a swooning of the power of clear and consecutive vision in a mere piling and excess of imagery and sound. The stroke on the mind at the time is not always equal to the look of the apparatus for inflicting it; and the memory does not retain a sufficient scar. No such objection can be urged against *The Daughter of Lebanon*, a fine visionary lyric of seven pages, figuring an early and miraculous conversion to Christianity in the person of an ideal girl of Damascus. Nor could any of De Quincey's readers give up the first two sections of *The English Mail Coach*, subtitled "The Glory of Motion" and "The Vision of Sudden Death." There is nothing in Jean Paul quite like these.

In the first we are back in the old days between Trafalgar and Waterloo. Drawn up at the General Post Office in Lombard Street, and waiting for the hour to start, we see His Majesty's mails, — carriages, harness, horses, lamps, the dresses of driver and guard, all in the perfection of English equipment, and, if there has been news that day of a great victory, then the laurels, the oak leaves, the flowers, the ribbons, in addition. Seating ourselves beside the driver on one of the mails, we begin our journey of three hundred miles along one of the great roads, north or west, leaving Lombard Street at a quarter past eight in the evening. How, once out into the country, we shoot along, horses at gallop, the breeze in our faces, hedges and trees and fields and homesteads rushing past us in the darkness which we and our

lamps are cleaving like a fiery arrow! How, at every stopping-station, there are the lights and bustle at the inn-door, and the laurels and other bedizenments we carry are seen ere we have well stopped, and we shout "Badajoz" or "Salamanca" in explanation, or whatever else may have been the last victory, and the hostlers and other inn-folk take up the huzza, and it is one round of congratulation and hand-shaking while we stay! But, punctually to the minute, having changed horses, and left the news palpitating in that neighbourhood, we are on again, horses at gallop, coach-lamps burning, and we beside the driver on the front seat, conscious that we are carrying the same news with us to neighbourhoods still ahead! On, on, stage after stage, in the same fashion, still cleaving the darkness, the horse-hoofs always audible and the coach-lamps always burning, till the darkness yields to a silver glimmer and the glimmer to the glare of day! — Such is the series of sensations De Quincey has contrived to give us in his prose-poem called "The Glory of Motion." In the sequel, entitled "The Vision of Sudden Death," we are still on the same night journey by coach, or rather on one later night journey on the northern road between sixty and seventy years ago, with the difference that the glory of motion is now turned into horror. Prosaically described, the paper is a recollection of a fatal accident by collision of the mail, in a very dark part of the road, with a solitary vehicle containing two persons, one of them a woman; but it is for the paper itself to show what the incident becomes in De Quincey's hands. — It passes into a third paper, still under the same general title of *The English Mail Coach;* which third paper indeed, bears the extraordinary subtitle of "Dream-Fugue, founded on the preceding theme of Sudden Death." I cannot say that this "dream-fugue," which is offered as a lyrical finale to the little series, in visionary coherence with the preceding pieces, accomplishes its purpose very successfully. It is liable to the objection which may be urged, as we have said, against other specimens of De Quincey in the peculiar art of dream-phantasy. The artifice is too apparent, and the meaning is all but lost in a mere vague of music.

Of the three scraps of the *Suspiria* that are entitled to rank among the lyrical prose-phantasies, viz., *Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow*, *Savannah-la-Mar*, and *Memorial Suspiria*, only the first is of much importance. But that scrap, written in De Quincey's later life, is of as high importance as anything he ever wrote.

It is perhaps the highest and finest thing, and also the most constitutionally significant, in all De Quincey. Fortunately, the essential core of it can be quoted entire. All that it is necessary to premise is that "Levana" was the Roman Goddess of Education, the divinity who was supposed to "lift up" every newly-born human being from the earth in token that it should live, and to rule the influences to which it should be subject thenceforth till its character should be fully formed: —

The Three Ladies of Sorrow

I know them thoroughly, and have walked in all their kingdoms. Three sisters they are, of one mysterious household; and their paths are wide apart; but of their dominion there is no end. Them I saw often conversing with Levana, and sometimes about myself. Do they talk, then? O, no! Mighty phantoms like these disdain the infirmities of language. They may utter voices through the organs of man when they dwell in human hearts, but amongst themselves there is no voice nor sound; eternal silence reigns in *their* kingdoms. They spoke not, as they talked with Levana; they whispered not; they sang not; though oftentimes methought they *might* have sung: for I upon earth had heard their mysteries oftentimes deciphered by harp and timbrel, by dulcimer and organ. Like God, whose servants they are, they utter their pleasure, not by sounds that perish, or by words that go astray, but by signs in heaven, by changes on earth, by pulses in secret rivers, heraldries painted in darkness, and hieroglyphics written on the tablets of the brain. *They* wheeled in mazes; *I* spelled the steps. *They* telegraphed from afar; *I* read the signals. *They* conspired together; and on the mirrors of darkness *my* eye traced the plots. *Theirs* were the symbols; *mine* are the words.

What is it the sisters are? What is it that they do? Let me describe their form and their presence: if form it were that still fluctuated in its outline, or presence it were that forever advanced to the front or forever receded amongst shades.

The eldest of the three is named *Mater Lachrymarum*, Our Lady of Tears. She it is that night and day raves and moans, calling for vanished faces. She stood in Rama, where a voice was heard of lamentation, — Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted. She it was that stood in Bethlehem on the night when Herod's sword swept its nurseries of innocents, and the little feet were stiffened forever, which, heard at times as they tottered along floors overhead, woke pulses of love in household hearts that were not unmarked in heaven. Her eyes are sweet and subtle, wild and sleepy, by turns; oftentimes rising to the clouds, oftentimes challenging the heavens. She wears a diadem round her head. And I knew by childish memories that she could go abroad upon the winds, when she heard the sobbing of litanies or the thundering of organs, and when she beheld the mustering of summer clouds. This sister, the eldest, it is that carries keys more than papal at her girdle, which open every cottage and every palace. She, to my knowledge, sat all last summer by the bedside of the blind beggar,

him that so often and so gladly I talked with, whose pious daughter, eight years old, with the sunny countenance, resisted the temptations of play and village mirth to travel all day long on dusty roads with her afflicted father. For this did God send her a great reward. In the spring time of the year, and whilst her own spring was budding, he recalled her to himself. But her blind father mourns forever over *her;* still he dreams at midnight that the little guiding hand is locked within his own; and still he awakens to a darkness that is now within a second and a deeper darkness. This *Mater Lachrymarum* also has been sitting all this winter of 1844–5 within the bedchamber of the Czar, bringing before his eyes a daughter, not less pious, that vanished to God not less suddenly, and left behind her a darkness not less profound. By the power of the keys it is that Our Lady of Tears glides, a ghostly intruder, into the chambers of sleepless men, sleepless women, sleepless children, from Ganges to the Nile, from Nile to Mississippi. And her, because she is the first-born of her house, and has the widest empire, let us honour with the title of Madonna.

The second sister is called *Mater Suspiriorum,* Our Lady of Sighs. She never scales the clouds, nor walks abroad upon the winds. She wears no diadem. And her eyes, if they were ever seen, would be neither sweet nor subtle; no man could read their story; they would be found filled with perishing dreams, and with wrecks of forgotten delirium. But she raises not her eyes; her head, on which sits a dilapidated turban, droops forever, forever fastens on the dust. She weeps not. She groans not. But she sighs inaudibly at intervals. Her sister, Madonna, is oftentimes stormy and frantic, raging in the highest against heaven, and demanding back her darlings. But Our Lady of Sighs never clamours, never defies, dreams not of rebellious aspirations. She is humble to abjectness. Hers is the meekness that belongs to the hopeless. Murmur she may, but it is in her sleep. Whisper she may, but it is to herself in the twilight. Mutter she does at times, but it is in solitary places that are desolate as she is desolate, in ruined cities, and when the sun has gone down to his rest. This sister is the visitor of the Pariah, of the Jew, of the bondsman to the oar in the Mediterranean galleys; of the English criminal in Norfolk Island, blotted out from the books of remembrance in sweet far-off England; of the baffled penitent reverting his eyes forever upon a solitary grave, which to him seems the altar overthrown of some past and bloody sacrifice, on which altar no oblations can now be availing, whether towards pardon that he might implore, or towards reparation that he might attempt. Every slave that at noonday looks up to the tropical sun with timid reproach, as he points with one hand to the earth, our general mother, but for *him* a stepmother, — as he points with the other hand to the Bible, our general teacher, but against *him* sealed and sequestered; every woman sitting in darkness, without love to shelter her head, or hope to illumine her solitude, because the heaven-born instincts kindling in her nature germs of holy affections, which God implanted in her womanly bosom, having been stifled by social necessities, now burn sullenly to waste, like sepulchral lamps amongst the ancients; every nun defrauded of her unreturning Maytime by wicked kinsmen, whom God will judge; all that are betrayed, and all that are rejected; outcasts by traditionary law, and children of hereditary disgrace: — all these walk with Our Lady of Sighs. She also carries a key, but she needs it little. For her kingdom is chiefly amongst the tents of Shem, and the houseless vagrant of every clime. Yet in the very highest walks of

man she finds chapels of her own; and even in glorious England there are some that, to the world, carry their heads as proudly as the reindeer, who yet secretly have received her mark upon their foreheads.

But the third sister, who is also the youngest —! Hush! whisper whilst we talk of *her!* Her kingdom is not large, or else no flesh should live; but within that kingdom all power is hers. Her head, turreted like that of Cybele, rises almost beyond the reach of sight. She droops not; and her eyes, rising so high, *might* be hidden by distance. But, being what they are, they cannot be hidden; through the treble veil of crape which she wears, the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests not for matins or for vespers, for noon of day or noon of night, for ebbing or for flowing tide, may be read from the very ground. She is the defier of God. She is also the mother of lunacies and the suggestress of suicides. Deep lie the roots of her power, but narrow is the nation that she rules. For she can approach only those in whom a profound nature has been upheaved by central convulsions, in whom the heart trembles and the brain rocks under conspiracies of tempest from without and tempest from within. Madonna moves with uncertain steps, fast or slow, but still with tragic grace. Our Lady of Sighs creeps timidly and stealthily. But this youngest sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with tiger's leaps. She carries no key; for, though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all. And *her* name is *Mater Tenebrarum*, Our Lady of Darkness.

This is prose-poetry; but it is more. It is a permanent addition to the mythology of the human race. As the Graces are three, as the Fates are three, as the Furies are three, as the Muses were originally three, so may the varieties and degrees of misery that there are in the world, and the proportions of their distribution among mankind, be represented to the human imagination forever by De Quincey's Three Ladies of Sorrow and his sketch of their figures and kingdoms.

III

SAMUEL JOHNSON

(1709–1784)

THE METAPHYSICAL POETS

[From the Life of Cowley (1780) in the *Lives of the Poets*]

Cowley, like other poets who have written with narrow views, and, instead of tracing intellectual pleasure to its natural sources in the mind of man, paid their court to temporary prejudices, has been at one time too much praised, and too much neglected at another.

Wit, like all other things subject by their nature to the choice of man, has its changes and fashions, and at different times takes different forms. About the beginning of the seventeenth century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets; of whom, in a criticism on the works of Cowley, it is not improper to give some account.

The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour; but, unluckily resolved to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.

If the father of criticism has rightly denominated poetry *τέχνη μιμητικὴ, an imitative art*, these writers will, without great wrong, lose their right to the name of poets; for they cannot be said to have imitated anything; they neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect.

Those, however, who deny them to be poets, allow them to be wits. Dryden confesses of himself and his contemporaries that

they fall below Donne in wit, but maintains that they surpass him in poetry.

If wit be well described by Pope, as being "that which has been often thought, but was never before so well expressed," they certainly never attained, nor ever sought it; for they endeavoured to be singular in their thoughts, and were careless of their diction. But Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous: he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language.

If by a more noble and more adequate conception that be considered as wit which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just; if it be that which he that never found it wonders how he missed; to wit of this kind the metaphysical poets have seldom risen. Their thoughts are often new, but seldom natural; they are not obvious, but neither are they just; and the reader, far from wondering that he missed them, wonders more frequently by what perverseness of industry they were ever found.

But wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors;* a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.

From this account of their compositions it will be readily inferred that they were not successful in representing or moving the affections. As they were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising, they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasure of other minds: they never inquired what, on any occasion, they should have said or done; but wrote rather as beholders than partakers of human nature; as Beings looking upon good and evil, impassive and at leisure; as Epicurean deities making remarks on the actions of men and the vicissitudes of life without interest and without emotion. Their courtship was void of fondness, and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had never been said before.

Nor was the sublime more within their reach than the pathetic; for they never attempted that comprehension and expanse of thought which at once fills the whole mind, and of which the first effect is sudden astonishment, and the second rational admiration. Sublimity is produced by aggregation, and littleness by dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness. It is with great propriety that subtlety, which in its original import means exility of particles, is taken in its metaphorical meaning for nicety of distinction. Those writers who lay on the watch for novelty could have little hope of greatness; for great things cannot have escaped former observation. Their attempts were always analytic; they broke every image into fragments: and could no more represent, by their slender conceits and laboured particularities, the prospects of nature or the scenes of life, than he who dissects a sunbeam with a prism can exhibit the wide effulgence of a summer noon.

What they wanted, however, of the sublime, they endeavoured to supply by hyperbole; their amplification had no limits; they left not only reason but fancy behind them; and produced combinations of confused magnificence that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined.

Yet great labour, directed by great abilities, is never wholly lost: if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth: if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan, it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the dignity of a writer, by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme and volubility of syllables.

In perusing the works of this race of authors, the mind is exercised either by recollection or inquiry; either something already learned is to be retrieved, or something new is to be examined. If their greatness seldom elevates, their acuteness often surprises; if the imagination is not always gratified, at least the powers of reflection and comparison are employed; and in the mass of materials which ingenious absurdity has thrown together, genuine wit and useful knowledge may be sometimes found, buried perhaps in grossness of expression, but useful to those who know their value; and such as, when they are expanded to perspicuity

and polished to elegance, may give lustre to works which have more propriety though less copiousness of sentiment.

This kind of writing, which was, I believe, borrowed from Marino and his followers, had been recommended by the example of Donne, a man of very extensive and various knowledge; and by Jonson, whose manner resembled that of Donne more in the ruggedness of his lines than in the cast of his sentiments.

When their reputation was high, they had undoubtedly more imitators than time has left behind. Their immediate successors, of whom any remembrance can be said to remain, were Suckling, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Cleveland, and Milton. Denham and Waller sought another way to fame, by improving the harmony of our numbers. Milton tried the metaphysic style only in his lines upon Hobson the Carrier. Cowley adopted it, and excelled his predecessors, having as much sentiment and more music. Suckling neither improved versification, nor abounded in conceits. The fashionable style remained chiefly with Cowley; Suckling could not reach it, and Milton disdained it.

Critical remarks are not easily understood without examples, and I have therefore collected instances of the modes of writing by which this species of poets, for poets they were called by themselves and their admirers, was eminently distinguished.

As the authors of this race were perhaps more desirous of being admired than understood, they sometimes drew their conceits from recesses of learning not very much frequented by common readers of poetry. Thus Cowley on *Knowledge:* —

> The sacred tree midst the fair orchard grew;
> The phœnix Truth did on it rest,
> And built his perfum'd nest,
> That right Porphyrian tree which did true logick shew.
> Each leaf did learned notions give,
> And th' apples were demonstrative:
> So clear their colour and divine,
> The very shade they cast did other lights outshine.

On Anacreon continuing a lover in his old age: —

> Love was with thy life entwin'd,
> Close as heat with fire is join'd,
> A powerful brand prescrib'd the date
> Of thine, like Meleager's fate.
> The antiperistasis of age
> More enflam'd thy amorous rage.

In the following verses we have an allusion to a Rabbinical opinion concerning Manna: —

> Variety I ask not: give me one
> To live perpetually upon.
> The person Love does to us fit,
> Like manna, has the taste of all in it.

Thus Donne shows his medicinal knowledge in some encomiastic verses: —

> In everything there naturally grows
> A Balsamum to keep it fresh and new,
> If 'twere not injur'd by extrinsique blows;
> Your youth and beauty are this balm in you.
> But you, of learning and religion,
> And virtue and such ingredients, have made
> A mithridate, whose operation
> Keeps off, or cures what can be done or said.

Though the following lines of Donne, on the last night of the year, have something in them too scholastic, they are not inelegant: —

> This twilight of two years, not past nor next,
> Some emblem is of me, or I of this,
> Who, meteor-like, of stuff and form perplext,
> Whose what and where, in disputation is,
> If I should call me any thing, should miss.
>
> I sum the years and me, and find me not
> Debtor to th' old, nor creditor to th' new,
> That cannot say, my thanks I have forgot,
> Nor trust I this with hopes: and yet scarce true
> This bravery is, since these times shew'd me you.
> — *Donne.*

Yet more abstruse and profound is Donne's reflection upon Man as a Microcosm: —

> If men be worlds, there is in every one
> Something to answer in some proportion
> All the world's riches: and in good men, this
> Virtue, our form's form, and our soul's soul is.

Of thoughts so far-fetched as to be not only unexpected but unnatural, all their books are full.

TO A LADY WHO WROTE POESIES FOR RINGS

They, who above do various circles find,
Say, like a ring th' æquator heaven does bind.
When heaven shall be adorn'd by thee,
(Which then more heaven than 'tis, will be)
'Tis thou must write the poesy there,
For it wanteth one as yet,
Though the sun pass through 't twice a year,
The sun, which is esteem'd the god of wit. — *Cowley.*

The difficulties which have been raised about identity in philosophy are by Cowley, with still more perplexity, applied to Love: —

Five years ago (says story) I lov'd you,
For which you call me most inconstant now;
Pardon me, madam, you mistake the man;
For I am not the same that I was then;
No flesh is now the same 'twas then in me,
And that my mind is chang'd yourself may see.

The same thoughts to retain still, and intents,
Were more inconstant far; for accidents
Must of all things most strangely inconstant prove,
If from one subject they t' another move:
My members then, the father members were
From whence these take their birth, which now are here.
If then this body love what th' other did,
'Twere incest, which by nature is forbid.

The love of different women is, in geographical poetry, compared to travels, through different countries: —

Hast thou not found each woman's breast
(The land where thou hast travelled)
Either by savages possest,
Or wild, and uninhabited?
What joy could'st take, or what repose,
In countries so unciviliz'd as those?
Lust, the scorching dog-star, here
Rages with immoderate heat;
Whilst Pride, the rugged Northern Bear,
In others makes the cold too great.
And when these are temperate known,
The soil's all barren sand, or rocky stone. — *Cowley.*

A lover, burnt up by his affections, is compared to Egypt: —

> The fate of Egypt I sustain,
> And never feel the dew of rain.
> From clouds which in the head appear;
> But all my too much moisture owe
> To overflowings of the heart below. — *Cowley.*

The lover supposes his lady acquainted with the ancient laws of augury and rites of sacrifice: —

> And yet this death of mine, I fear,
> Will ominous to her appear:
> When found in every other part,
> Her sacrifice is found without an heart.
> For the last tempest of my death
> Shall sigh out that too, with my breath.

That the chaos was harmonized, has been recited of old; but whence the different sounds arose remained for a modern to discover: —

> Th' ungovern'd parts no correspondence knew,
> And artless war from thwarting motions grew;
> Till they to number and fixt rules were brought,
> Water and air he for the Tenor chose.
> Earth made the Base, the Treble flame arose. — *Cowley.*

The tears of lovers are always of great poetical account, but Donne has extended them into worlds. If the lines are not easily understood, they may be read again: —

> On a round ball
> A workman, that hath copies by, can lay
> An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,
> And quickly make that, which was nothing, all.
> So doth each tear,
> Which thee doth wear,
> A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
> Till thy tears mixt with mine do overflow
> This world, by waters sent from thee my heaven dissolved so.

On reading the following lines, the reader may perhaps cry out, "Confusion worse confounded": —

> Here lies a she sun, and a he moon here,
> She gives the best light to his sphere,
> Or each is both, and all, and so
> They unto one another nothing owe. — *Donne.*

Who but Donne would have thought that a good man is a telescope?

> Though God be our true glass, through which we see
> All, since the being of all things is He,
> Yet are the trunks, which do to us derive
> Things, in proportion fit, by perspective
> Deeds of good men; for by their living here,
> Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near.

Who would imagine it possible that in a very few lines so many remote ideas could be brought together?

> Since 'tis my doom, Love's undershrieve,
> Why this reprieve?
> Why doth my She Advowson fly
> Incumbency?
> To sell thyself dost thou intend
> By candle's end,
> And hold the contrast thus in doubt,
> Life's taper out?
> Think but how soon the market fails,
> Your sex lives faster than the males;
> As if to measure age's span,
> The sober Julian were th' account of man,
> Whilst you live by the fleet Gregorian. — *Cleveland.*

Of enormous and disgusting hyperboles, these may be examples: —

> By every wind, that comes this way,
> Send me at least a sigh or two,
> Such and so many I'll repay
> As shall themselves make winds to get to you. — *Cowley.*

> In tears I'll waste these eyes,
> By Love so vainly fed;
> So lust of old the Deluge punished. — *Cowley.*

> All arm'd in brass the richest dress of war,
> (A dismal glorious sight) he shone afar.
> The sun himself started with sudden fright,
> To see his beams return so dismal bright. — *Cowley.*

An universal consternation: —

> His bloody eyes he hurls round, his sharp paws
> Tear up the ground; then runs he wild about,
> Lashing his angry tail and roaring out.

Beasts creep into their dens, and tremble there;
Trees, though no wind is stirring, shake with fear;
Silence and horror fill the place around:
Echo itself dares scarce repeat the sound. — *Cowley.*

Their fictions were often violent and unnatural.

OF HIS MISTRESS BATHING

The fish around her crowded, as they do
To the false light that treacherous fishers shew,
And all with as much ease might taken be,
As she at first took me:
For ne'er did light so clear
Among the waves appear,
Though every night the sun himself set there. — *Cowley.*

The poetical effect of a lover's name upon glass: —

My name engrav'd herein
Doth contribute my firmness to this glass;
Which, ever since that charm, hath been
As hard as that which grav'd it was. — *Donne.*

Their conceits were sometimes slight and trifling.

ON AN INCONSTANT WOMAN

He enjoys thy calmly sunshine now,
And no breath stirring hears,
In the clear heaven of thy brow,
No smallest cloud appears.
He sees thee gentle, fair and gay,
And trusts the faithless April of thy May. — *Cowley.*

Upon a paper written with the juice of lemon, and read by the fire: —

Nothing yet in thee is seen:
But when a genial heat warms thee within,
A new-born wood of various lines there grows;
Here buds an L, and there a B,
Here sprouts a V, and there a T,
And all the flourishing letters stand in rows. — *Cowley.*

As they sought only for novelty, they did not much inquire whether their allusions were to things high or low, elegant or gross; whether they compared the little to the great, or the great to the little.

PHYSICK AND CHIRURGERY FOR A LOVER

Gently, ah gently, madam, touch
The wound, which you yourself have made;
That pain must needs be very much,
Which makes me of your hand afraid.
Cordials of pity give me now,
For I too weak for purgings grow. — *Cowley.*

THE WORLD AND A CLOCK

Mahol, th' inferior world's fantastic face,
Through all the turns of matter's maze did trace;
Great Nature's well-set clock in pieces took;
On all the springs and smallest wheels did look
Of life and motion; and with equal art
Made up again the whole of every part. — *Cowley.*

A coal-pit has not often found its poet; but, that it may not want its due honour, Cleveland has paralleled it with the sun: —

The moderate value of our guiltless ore
Makes no man atheist, and no woman whore;
Yet why should hallow'd vestals' sacred shrine
Deserve more honour than a flaming mine?
These pregnant wombs of heat would fitter be
Than a few embers, for a deity.

Had he our pits, the Persian would admire
No sun, but warm's devotion at our fire:
He'd leave the trotting whipster, and prefer
Our profound Vulcan 'bove that waggoner.
For wants he heat or light? or would have store
Of both? 'tis here: and what can suns give more?
Nay, what's the sun but, in a different name,
A coal-pit rampant, or a mine on flame!
Then let this truth reciprocally run
The sun's heaven's coalery, and coals our sun.

DEATH, A VOYAGE

No family
E'er rigg'd a soul for heaven's discovery,
With whom more venturers might boldly dare
Venture their stakes, with him in joy to share. — *Donne.*

Their thoughts and expressions were sometimes grossly absurd, and such as no figures or license can reconcile to the understanding.

A LOVER NEITHER DEAD NOR ALIVE

Then down I laid my head,
Down on cold earth; and for a while was dead,
And my freed soul to a strange somewhere fled:
  Ah, sottish soul, said I,
  When back to its cage again I saw it fly:
  Fool to resume her broken chain!
  And row her galley here again!
  Fool, to that body to return
Where it condemn'd and destin'd is to burn!
  Once dead, how can it be,
Death should a thing so pleasant seem to thee,
That thou should'st come to live it o'er again in me? — *Cowley.*

A LOVER'S HEART A HAND GRENADO

Wo to her stubborn heart, if once mine come
  Into the self-same room,
  'Twill tear and blow up all within,
Like a grenado shot into a magazin.
Then shall Love keep the ashes, and torn parts,
  Of both our broken hearts:
  Shall out of both one new one make;
From hers th' allay; from mine, the metal take. — *Cowley.*

THE POETICAL PROPAGATION OF LIGHT

The Prince's favour is diffus'd o'er all,
From which all fortunes, names, and natures fall;
Then from those wombs of stars, the Bride's bright eyes,
  At every glance a constellation flies,
And sows the court with stars, and doth prevent
  In light and power, the all-ey'd firmament:
First her eye kindles other ladies' eyes,
  Then from their beams their jewels' lustres rise;
And from their jewels torches do take fire,
And all is warmth, and light, and good desire. — *Donne.*

They were in very little care to clothe their notions with elegance of dress, and therefore miss the notice and the praise which are often gained by those who think less, but are more diligent to adorn their thoughts.

That a mistress beloved is fairer in idea than in reality is by Cowley thus expressed: —

> Thou in my fancy dost much higher stand,
> Than woman can be plac'd by Nature's hand;
> And I must needs, I'm sure, a loser be,
> To change thee, as thou'rt there, for very thee.

That prayer and labour should coöperate are thus taught by Donne: —

> In none but us, are such mixt engines found,
> As hands of double office: for the ground
> We till with them; and them to heaven we raise;
> Who prayerless labours, or without this, prays,
> Doth but one half, that's none.

By the same author, a common topic, the danger of procrastination, is thus illustrated: —

> — That which I should have begun
> In my youth's morning, now late must be done;
> And I, as giddy travellers must do,
> Which stray or sleep all day, and having lost
> Light and strength, dark and tir'd must then ride post.

All that Man has to do is to live and die; the sum of humanity is comprehended by Donne in the following lines: —

> Think in how poor a prison thou didst lie;
> After, enabled but to suck and cry.
> Think, when 'twas grown to most, 'twas a poor inn,
> A province pack'd up in two yards of skin,
> And that usurp'd, or threaten'd with a rage
> Of sicknesses, or their true mother, age.
> But think that death hath now enfranchis'd thee;
> Thou hast thy expansion now, and liberty;
> Think, that a rusty piece discharg'd is flown
> In pieces, and the bullet is his own,
> And freely flies; this to thy soul allow,
> Think thy shell broke, think thy soul hatched but now.

They were sometimes indelicate and disgusting. Cowley thus apostrophizes beauty: —

> — Thou tyrant, which leav'st no man free!
> Thou subtle thief, from whom nought safe can be!
> Thou murtherer, which hast kill'd, and devil, which would'st damn me.

Thus he addresses his mistress: —

> Thou who, in many a propriety,
> So truly art the sun to me.
> Add one more likeness, which I'm sure you can,
> And let me and my sun beget a man.

Thus he represents the meditations of a lover: —

> Though in thy thoughts scarce any tracts have been
> So much as of original sin,
> Such charms thy beauty wears as might
> Desires in dying confest saints excite.
> Thou with strange adultery
> Dost in each breast a brothel keep;
> Awake, all men do lust for thee,
> And some enjoy thee when they sleep.

The true taste of tears: —

> Hither with crystal vials, lovers, come,
> And take my tears, which are Love's wine,
> And try your mistress' tears at home;
> For all are false, that taste not just like mine. — *Donne.*

This is yet more indelicate: —

> As the sweet sweat of roses in a still
> As that which from chaf'd musk-cat's pores doth trill,
> As th' almighty balm of th' early East,
> Such are the sweet drops of my mistress' breast.
> And on her neck her skin such lustre sets,
> They seem no sweat-drops, but pearl coronets:
> Rank sweaty froth thy mistress' brow defiles. — *Donne.*

Their expressions sometimes raise horror, when they intend perhaps to be pathetic: —

> As men in hell are from diseases free,
> So from all other ills am I.
> Free from their known formality:
> But all pains eminently lie in thee. — *Cowley.*

They were not always strictly curious, whether the opinions from which they drew their illustrations were true; it was enough that they were popular. Bacon remarks that some falsehoods are continued by tradition, because they supply commodious allusions.

It gave a piteous groan, and so it broke;
In vain it something would have spoke:
The love within too strong for 'twas,
Like poison put into a Venice-glass. — *Cowley.*

In forming descriptions, they looked out, not for images, but for conceits. Night has been a common subject, which poets have contended to adorn. Dryden's Night is well known; Donne's is as follows: —

Thou seest me here at midnight, now all rest:
Time's dead low-water; when all minds divest
To-morrow's business, when the labourers have
Such rest in bed, that their last church-yard grave,
Subject to change, will scarce be a type of this;
Now when the client, whose last hearing is
To-morrow, sleeps; when the condemned man,
Who when he opes his eyes, must shut them then
Again by death, although sad watch he keep,
Doth practise dying by a little sleep,
Thou at this midnight seest me.

It must be, however, confessed of these writers that if they are upon common subjects often unnecessarily and unpoetically subtle, yet where scholastic speculation can be properly admitted, their copiousness and acuteness may justly be admired. What Cowley has written upon Hope shows an unequalled fertility of invention: —

Hope, whose weak being ruin'd is,
Alike if it succeed, and if it miss;
Whom good or ill does equally confound,
And both the horns of Fate's dilemma wound.
Vain shadow, which dost vanish quite,
Both at full noon and perfect night!
The stars have not a possibility
Of blessing thee;
If things then from their end we happy call,
'Tis hope is the most hopeless thing of all.
Hope, thou bold taster of delight,
Who, whilst thou shouldst but taste, devour'st it quite!
Thou bring'st us an estate, yet leav'st us poor,
By clogging it with legacies before!
The joys, which we entire should wed,
Come deflower'd virgins to our bed;
Good fortune without gain imported be,
Such mighty customs paid to thee:
For joy, like wine, kept close does better taste;
If it take air before, its spirits waste.

To the following comparison of a man that travels and his wife that stays at home, with a pair of compasses, it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has the better claim: —

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin-compasses are two,
Thy soul, the fixt foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
Like th' other foot, obliquely run.
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun. — *Donne*.

In all these examples it is apparent that whatever is improper or vicious is produced by a voluntary deviation from nature in pursuit of something new and strange, and that the writers fail to give delight by their desire of exciting admiration.

IV

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

(1800–1859)

MR. ROBERT MONTGOMERY'S POEMS

[Appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* for April, 1830, as a criticism of the following books:
1. *The Omnipresence of the Deity: a Poem.* By ROBERT MONTGOMERY. Eleventh Edition. London: 1830.
2. *Satan: a Poem.* By ROBERT MONTGOMERY. Second Edition. London: 1830.]

THE wise men of antiquity loved to convey instruction under the covering of apologue; and though this practice is generally thought childish, we shall make no apology for adopting it on the present occasion. A generation which has bought eleven editions of a poem by Mr. Robert Montgomery may well condescend to listen to a fable of Pilpay.

A pious Brahmin, it is written, made a vow that on a certain day he would sacrifice a sheep, and on the appointed morning he went forth to buy one. There lived in his neighbourhood three rogues who knew of his vow, and laid a scheme for profiting by it. The first met him and said, "Oh Brahmin, wilt thou buy a sheep? I have one fit for sacrifice." "It is for that very purpose," said the holy man, "that I came forth this day." Then the impostor opened a bag, and brought out of it an unclean beast, an ugly dog, lame and blind. Thereon the Brahmin cried out, "Wretch, who touchest things impure, and utterest things untrue; callest thou that cur a sheep?" "Truly," answered the other, "it is a sheep of the finest fleece, and of the sweetest flesh. Oh Brahmin, it will be an offering most acceptable to the gods." "Friend," said the Brahmin, "either thou or I must be blind."

Just then one of the accomplices came up. "Praised be the gods," said the second rogue, "that I have been saved the trouble of going to the market for a sheep! This is such a sheep as I

wanted. For how much wilt thou sell it?" When the Brahmin heard this, his mind waved to and fro, like one swinging in the air at a holy festival. "Sir," said he to the newcomer, "take heed what thou dost; this is no sheep, but an unclean cur." "Oh Brahmin," said the newcomer, "thou art drunk or mad!"

At this time the third confederate drew near. "Let us ask this man," said the Brahmin, "what the creature is, and I will stand by what he shall say." To this the others agreed; and the Brahmin called out, "Oh stranger, what dost thou call this beast?" "Surely, oh Brahmin," said the knave, "it is a fine sheep." Then the Brahmin said, "Surely the gods have taken away my senses;" and he asked pardon of him who carried the dog, and bought it for a measure of rice and a pot of ghee, and offered it up to the gods, who, being wroth at this unclean sacrifice, smote him with a sore disease in all his joints.

Thus, or nearly thus, if we remember rightly, runs the story of the Sanscrit Æsop. The moral, like the moral of every fable that is worth the telling, lies on the surface. The writer evidently means to caution us against the practices of puffers, a class of people who have more than once talked the public into the most absurd errors, but who surely never played a more curious or a more difficult trick than when they passed Mr. Robert Montgomery off upon the world as a great poet.

In an age in which there are so few readers that a writer cannot subsist on the sum arising from the sale of his works, no man who has not an independent fortune can devote himself to literary pursuits, unless he is assisted by patronage. In such an age, accordingly, men of letters too often pass their lives in dangling at the heels of the wealthy and powerful; and all the faults which dependence tends to produce, pass into their character. They become the parasites and slaves of the great. It is melancholy to think how many of the highest and most exquisitely formed of human intellects have been condemned to the ignominious labour of disposing the commonplaces of adulation in new forms and brightening them into new splendour. Horace invoking Augustus in the most enthusiastic language of religious veneration; Statius flattering a tyrant, and the minion of a tyrant, for a morsel of bread; Ariosto versifying the whole genealogy of a niggardly patron; Tasso extolling the heroic virtues of the wretched creature who locked him up in a madhouse: these are but a few of the instances which might easily be given of the degradation to which

those must submit who, not possessing a competent fortune, are resolved to write when there are scarcely any who read.

This evil the progress of the human mind tends to remove. As a taste for books becomes more and more common, the patronage of individuals becomes less and less necessary. In the middle of the last century a marked change took place. The tone of literary men, both in this country and in France, became higher and more independent. Pope boasted that he was the "one poet" who had "pleased by manly ways"; he derided the soft dedications with which Halifax had been fed, asserted his own superiority over the pensioned Boileau, and gloried in being not the follower, but the friend, of nobles and princes. The explanation of all this is very simple. Pope was the first Englishman who, by the mere sale of his writings, realized a sum which enabled him to live in comfort and in perfect independence. Johnson extols him for the magnanimity which he showed in inscribing his *Iliad*, not to a minister or a peer, but to Congreve. In our time this would scarcely be a subject for praise. Nobody is astonished when Mr. Moore pays a compliment of this kind to Sir Walter Scott, or Sir Walter Scott to Mr. Moore. The idea of either of those gentlemen looking out for some lord who would be likely to give him a few guineas in return for a fulsome dedication seems laughably incongruous. Yet this is exactly what Dryden or Otway would have done; and it would be hard to blame them for it. Otway is said to have been choked with a piece of bread which he devoured in the rage of hunger; and, whether this story be true or false, he was beyond all question miserably poor. Dryden, at near seventy, when at the head of the literary men of England, without equal or second, received three hundred pounds for his *Fables*, a collection of ten thousand verses, and of such verses as no man then living, except himself, could have produced. Pope, at thirty, had laid up between six and seven thousand pounds, the fruits of his poetry. It was not, we suspect, because he had a higher spirit or a more scrupulous conscience than his predecessors, but because he had a larger income, that he kept up the dignity of the literary character so much better than they had done.

From the time of Pope to the present day the readers have been constantly becoming more and more numerous, and the writers, consequently, more and more independent. It is assuredly a great evil that men, fitted by their talents and acquirements to

enlighten and charm the world, should be reduced to the necessity of flattering wicked and foolish patrons in return for the sustenance of life. But, though we heartily rejoice that this evil is removed, we cannot but see with concern that another evil has succeeded to it. The public is now the patron, and a most liberal patron. All that the rich and powerful bestowed on authors from the time of Mæcenas to that of Harley would not, we apprehend, make up a sum equal to that which has been paid by English booksellers to authors during the last fifty years. Men of letters have accordingly ceased to court individuals, and have begun to court the public. They formerly used flattery. They now use puffing.

Whether the old or the new vice be the worse, whether those who formerly lavished insincere praise on others, or those who now contrive by every art of beggary and bribery to stun the public with praises of themselves, disgrace their vocation the more deeply, we shall not attempt to decide. But of this we are sure, that it is high time to make a stand against the new trickery. The puffing of books is now so shamefully and so successfully carried on that it is the duty of all who are anxious for the purity of the national taste, or for the honour of the literary character, to join in discountenancing the practice. All the pens that ever were employed in magnifying Bish's lucky office, Romanis's fleecy hosiery, Packwood's razor strops, and Rowland's Kalydor, all the placard-bearers of Dr. Eady, all the wall-chalkers of Day and Martin, seem to have taken service with the poets and novelists of this generation. Devices which in the lowest trades are considered as disreputable are adopted without scruple, and improved upon with a despicable ingenuity, by people engaged in a pursuit which never was and never will be considered as a mere trade by any man of honour and virtue. A butcher of the higher class disdains to ticket his meat. A mercer of the higher class would be ashamed to hang up papers in his window inviting the passers-by to look at the stock of a bankrupt, all of the first quality, and going for half the value. We expect some reserve, some decent pride, in our hatter and our bootmaker. But no artifice by which notoriety can be obtained is thought too abject for a man of letters.

It is amusing to think over the history of most of the publications which have had a run during the last few years. The publisher is often the publisher of some periodical work. In this periodical work the first flourish of trumpets is sounded. The

peal is then echoed and reëchoed by all the other periodical works over which the publisher, or the author, or the author's coterie, may have any influence. The newspapers are for a fortnight filled with puffs of all the various kinds which Sheridan enumerated, direct, oblique, and collusive. Sometimes the praise is laid on thick for simple-minded people. "Pathetic," "sublime," "splendid," "graceful," "brilliant wit," "exquisite humour," and other phrases equally flattering, fall in a shower as thick and as sweet as the sugar-plums at a Roman carnival. Sometimes greater art is used. A sinecure has been offered to the writer if he would suppress his work, or if he would even soften down a few of his incomparable portraits. A distinguished military and political character has challenged the inimitable satirist of the vices of the great; and the puffer is glad to learn that the parties have been bound over to keep the peace. Sometimes it is thought expedient that the puffer should put on a grave face, and utter his panegyric in the form of admonition. "Such attacks on private character cannot be too much condemned. Even the exuberant wit of our author, and the irresistible power of his withering sarcasm, are no excuses for that utter disregard which he manifests for the feelings of others. We cannot but wonder that a writer of such transcendent talents, a writer who is evidently no stranger to the kindly charities and sensibilities of our nature, should show so little tenderness to the foibles of noble and distinguished individuals, with whom it is clear, from every page of his work, that he must have been constantly mingling in society." These are but tame and feeble imitations of the paragraphs with which the daily papers are filled whenever an attorney's clerk or an apothecary's assistant undertakes to tell the public in bad English and worse French, how people tie their neckcloths and eat their dinners in Grosvenor Square. The editors of the higher and more respectable newspapers usually prefix the words "Advertisement," or "From a Correspondent," to such paragraphs. But this makes little difference. The panegyric is extracted, and the significant heading omitted. The fulsome eulogy makes its appearance on the covers of all the Reviews and Magazines, with *Times* or *Globe* affixed, though the editors of the *Times* and the *Globe* have no more to do with it than with Mr. Goss's way of making old rakes young again.

That people who live by personal slander should practise these arts is not surprising. Those who stoop to write calumnious

books may well stoop to puff them; and that the basest of all trades should be carried on in the basest of all manners is quite proper and as it should be. But how any man who has the least self-respect, the least regard for his own personal dignity, can condescend to persecute the public with this Rag-fair importunity, we do not understand. Extreme poverty may, indeed, in some degree, be an excuse for employing these shifts, as it may be an excuse for stealing a leg of mutton. But we really think that a man of spirit and delicacy would quite as soon satisfy his wants in the one way as in the other.

It is no excuse for an author that the praises of journalists are procured by the money or influence of his publishers, and not by his own. It is his business to take such precautions as may prevent others from doing what must degrade him. It is for his honour as a gentleman, and, if he is really a man of talents, it will eventually be for his honour and interest as a writer, that his works should come before the public recommended by their own merits alone, and should be discussed with perfect freedom. If his objects be really such as he may own without shame, he will find that they will, in the long-run, be better attained by suffering the voice of criticism to be fairly heard. At present, we too often see a writer attempting to obtain literary fame as Shakespeare's usurper obtains sovereignty. The publisher plays Buckingham to the author's Richard. Some few creatures of the conspiracy are dexterously disposed here and there in the crowd. It is the business of these hirelings to throw up their caps, and clap their hands, and utter their *vivas*. The rabble at first stare and wonder, and at last join in shouting for shouting's sake; and thus a crown is placed on a head which has no right to it, by the huzzas of a few servile dependants.

The opinion of the great body of the reading public is very materially influenced even by the unsupported assertions of those who assume a right to criticise. Nor is the public altogether to blame on this account. Most even of those who have really a great enjoyment in reading are in the same state, with respect to a book, in which a man who has never given particular attention to the art of painting is with respect to a picture. Every man who has the least sensibility or imagination derives a certain pleasure from pictures. Yet a man of the highest and finest intellect might, unless he had formed his taste by contemplating the best pictures, be easily persuaded by a knot of connoisseurs

that the worst daub in Somerset House was a miracle of art If he deserves to be laughed at, it is not for his ignorance of pictures, but for his ignorance of men. He knows that there is a delicacy of taste in painting which he does not possess, that he cannot distinguish hands, as practised judges distinguish them, that he is not familiar with the finest models, that he has never looked at them with close attention, and that, when the general effect of a piece has pleased him or displeased him, he has never troubled himself to ascertain why. When, therefore, people, whom he thinks more competent to judge than himself, and of whose sincerity he entertains no doubt, assure him that a particular work is exquisitely beautiful, he takes it for granted that they must be in the right. He returns to the examination, resolved to find or imagine beauties; and, if he can work himself up into something like admiration, he exults in his own proficiency.

Just such is the manner in which nine readers out of ten judge of a book. They are ashamed to dislike what men who speak as having authority declare to be good. At present, however contemptible a poem or a novel may be, there is not the least difficulty in procuring favourable notices of it from all sorts of publications, daily, weekly, and monthly. In the meantime, little or nothing is said on the other side. The author and the publisher are interested in crying up the book. Nobody has any very strong interest in crying it down. Those who are best fitted to guide the public opinion think it beneath them to expose mere nonsense, and comfort themselves by reflecting that such popularity cannot last. This contemptuous lenity has been carried too far. It is perfectly true that reputations which have been forced into an unnatural bloom fade almost as soon as they have expanded; nor have we any apprehensions that puffing will ever raise any scribbler to the rank of a classic. It is indeed amusing to turn over some late volumes of periodical works, and to see how many immortal productions have, within a few months, been gathered to the Poems of Blackmore and the novels of Mrs. Behn; how many "profound views of human nature," and "exquisite delineations of fashionable manners," and "vernal, and sunny, and refreshing thoughts," and "high imaginings," and "young breathings," and "embodyings," and "pinings," and "minglings with the beauty of the universe," and "harmonies which dissolve the soul in a passionate sense of loveliness and divinity," the world has contrived to forget. The names of the books and of the

writers are buried in as deep an oblivion as the name of the builder of Stonehenge. Some of the well-puffed fashionable novels of eighteen hundred and twenty-nine hold the pastry of eighteen hundred and thirty; and others, which are now extolled in language almost too high-flown for the merits of *Don Quixote*, will, we have no doubt, line the trunks of eighteen hundred and thirty-one. But, though we have no apprehensions that puffing will ever confer permanent reputation on the undeserving, we still think its influence most pernicious. Men of real merit will, if they persevere, at last reach the station to which they are entitled, and intruders will be ejected with contempt and derision. But it is no small evil that the avenues to fame should be blocked up by a swarm of noisy, pushing, elbowing pretenders, who, though they will not ultimately be able to make good their own entrance, hinder, in the meantime, those who have a right to enter. All who will not disgrace themselves by joining in the unseemly scuffle must expect to be at first hustled and shouldered back. Some men of talents, accordingly, turn away in dejection from pursuits in which success appears to bear no proportion to desert. Others employ in self-defence the means by which competitors, far inferior to themselves, appear for a time to obtain a decided advantage. There are few who have sufficient confidence in their own powers and sufficient elevation of mind, to wait with secure and contemptuous patience, while dunce after dunce presses before them. Those who will not stoop to the baseness of the modern fashion are too often discouraged. Those who do stoop to it are always degraded.

We have of late observed with great pleasure some symptoms which lead us to hope that respectable literary men of all parties are beginning to be impatient of this insufferable nuisance. And we purpose to do what in us lies for the abating of it. We do not think that we can more usefully assist in this good work than by showing our honest countrymen what that sort of poetry is which puffing can drive through eleven editions, and how easily any bellman might, if a bellman would stoop to the necessary degree of meanness, become a "master-spirit of the age." We have no enmity to Mr. Robert Montgomery. We know nothing whatever about him, except what we have learned from his books, and from the portrait prefixed to one of them, in which he appears to be doing his very best to look like a man of genius and sensibility, though with less success than his strenuous exertions deserve.

We select him, because his works have received more enthusiastic praise, and have deserved more unmixed contempt, than any which, as far as our knowledge extends, have appeared within the last three or four years. His writing bears the same relation to poetry which a Turkey carpet bears to a picture. There are colours in the Turkey carpet out of which a picture might be made. There are words in Mr. Montgomery's writing which, when disposed in certain orders and combinations, have made, and will again make, good poetry. But, as they now stand, they seem to be put together on principle in such a manner as to give no image of anything "in the heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth."

The poem on the *Omnipresence of the Deity* commences with a description of the creation, in which we can find only one thought which has the least pretension to ingenuity, and that one thought is stolen from Dryden, and marred in the stealing: —

> "Last, softly beautiful, as music's close,
> Angelic woman into being rose."

The all-pervading influence of the Supreme Being is then described in a few tolerable lines borrowed from Pope, and a great many intolerable lines of Mr. Robert Montgomery's own. The following may stand as a specimen: —

> "But who could trace Thine unrestricted course,
> Though Fancy followed with immortal force?
> There's not a blossom fondled by the breeze,
> There's not a fruit that beautifies the trees,
> There's not a particle in sea or air,
> But nature owns thy plastic influence there!
> With fearful gaze, still be it mine to see
> How all is fill'd and vivified by Thee;
> Upon thy mirror, earth's majestic view,
> To paint Thy Presence, and to feel it too."

The last two lines contain an excellent specimen of Mr. Robert Montgomery's Turkey carpet style of writing. The majestic view of earth is the mirror of God's presence; and on this mirror Mr. Robert Montgomery paints God's presence. The use of a mirror, we submit, is not to be painted upon.

A few more lines, as bad as those which we have quoted, bring us to one of the most amusing instances of literary pilfering which we remember. It might be of use to plagiarists to know, as a

general rule, that what they steal is, to employ a phrase common in advertisements, of no use to any but the right owner. We never fell in, however, with any plunderer who so little understood how to turn his booty to good account as Mr. Montgomery. Lord Byron, in a passage which everybody knows by heart, has said, addressing the sea,

> "Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow."

Mr. Robert Montgomery very coolly appropriates the image and reproduces the stolen goods in the following form: —

> "And thou, vast Ocean, on whose awful face
> Time's iron feet can print no ruin-trace."

So may such ill-got gains ever prosper!

The effect which the Ocean has on Atheists is then described in the following lofty lines: —

> "Oh! never did the dark-soul'd ATHEIST stand,
> And watch the breakers boiling on the strand,
> And, while Creation stagger'd at his nod,
> Mock the dread presence of the mighty God!
> We hear Him in the wind-heaved ocean's roar,
> Hurling her billowy crags upon the shore;
> We hear Him in the riot of the blast,
> And shake, while rush the raving whirlwinds past!"

If Mr. Robert Montgomery's genius were not far too free and aspiring to be shackled by the rules of syntax, we should suppose that it is at the nod of the Atheist that creation staggers. But Mr. Robert Montgomery's readers must take such grammar as they can get, and be thankful.

A few more lines bring us to another instance of unprofitable theft. Sir Walter Scott has these lines in the *Lord of the Isles*: —

> "The dew that on the violet lies,
> Mocks the dark lustre of thine eyes."

This is pretty taken separately, and, as is always the case with the good things of good writers, much prettier in its place than can even be conceived by those who see it only detached from the context. Now for Mr. Montgomery: —

> "And the bright dew-bead on the bramble lies,
> Like liquid rapture upon beauty's eyes."

The comparison of a violet, bright with the dew, to a woman's eyes, is as perfect as a comparison can be. Sir Walter's lines are part of a song addressed to a woman at daybreak, when the violets are bathed in dew; and the comparison is therefore peculiarly natural and graceful. Dew on a bramble is no more like a woman's eyes than dew anywhere else. There is a very pretty Eastern tale of which the fate of plagiarists often reminds us. The slave of a magician saw his master wave his wand, and heard him give orders to the spirits who arose at the summons. The slave stole the wand, and waved it himself in the air; but he had not observed that his master used the left hand for that purpose. The spirits thus irregularly summoned tore the thief to pieces instead of obeying his orders. There are very few who can safely venture to conjure with the rod of Sir Walter; and Mr. Robert Montgomery is not one of them.

Mr. Campbell, in one of his most pleasing pieces, has this line,

"The sentinel stars set their watch in the sky."

The thought is good, and has a very striking propriety where Mr. Campbell has placed it, in the mouth of a soldier telling his dream. But, though Shakespeare assures us that "every true man's apparel fits your thief," it is by no means the case, as we have already seen, that every true poet's similitude fits your plagiarist. Let us see how Mr. Robert Montgomery uses the image: —

"Ye quenchless stars! so eloquently bright,
Untroubled sentries of the shadowy night,
While half the world is lapp'd in downy dreams,
And round the lattice creep your midnight beams,
How sweet to gaze upon your placid eyes,
In lambent beauty looking from the skies."

Certainly the ideas of eloquence, of untroubled repose, of placid eyes, of the lambent beauty on which it is sweet to gaze, harmonize admirably with the idea of a sentry.

We would not be understood, however, to say, that Mr. Robert Montgomery cannot make similitudes for himself. A very few lines further on, we find one which has every mark of originality, and on which, we will be bound, none of the poets whom he has plundered will ever think of making reprisals: —

"The soul, aspiring, pants its source to mount,
As streams meander level with their fount."

We take this to be, on the whole, the worst similitude in the world. In the first place, no stream meanders, or can possibly meander, level with its fount. In the next place, if streams did meander level with their founts, no two motions can be less like each other than that of meandering level and that of mounting upwards.

We have then an apostrophe to the Deity, couched in terms which, in any writer who dealt in meanings, we should call profane, but to which we suppose Mr. Robert Montgomery attaches no idea whatever: —

> "Yes! pause and think, within one fleeting hour,
> How vast a universe obeys Thy power;
> Unseen, but felt, Thine interfused control
> Works in each atom, and pervades the whole;
> Expands the blossom, and erects the tree,
> Conducts each vapour, and commands each sea,
> Beams in each ray, bids whirlwinds be unfurl'd,
> Unrols the thunder, and upheaves a world!"

No field-preacher surely ever carried his irreverent familiarity so far as to bid the Supreme Being stop and think on the importance of the interests which are under His care. The grotesque indecency of such an address throws into shade the subordinate absurdities of the passage, the unfurling of whirlwinds, the unrolling of thunder, and the upheaving of worlds.

Then comes a curious specimen of our poet's English: —

> "Yet not alone created realms engage
> Thy faultless wisdom, grand, primeval sage!
> For all the thronging woes to life allied
> Thy mercy tempers, and thy cares provide."

We should be glad to know what the word "For" means here. If it is a preposition, it makes nonsense of the words, "Thy mercy tempers." If it is an adverb, it makes nonsense of the words, "Thy cares provide." These beauties we have taken, almost at random, from the first part of the poem. The second part is a series of descriptions of various events, a battle, a murder, an execution, a marriage, a funeral, and so forth. Mr. Robert Montgomery terminates each of these descriptions by assuring us that the Deity was present at the battle, murder, execution, marriage or funeral in question. And this proposition which might be safely predicated of every event that ever happened

or ever will happen, forms the only link which connects these descriptions with the subject or with each other.

How the descriptions are executed our readers are probably by this time able to conjecture. The battle is made up of the battles of all ages and nations: "red-mouthed cannons, uproaring to the clouds," and "hands grasping firm the glittering shield." The only military operations of which this part of the poem reminds us, are those which reduced the Abbey of Quedlinburgh to submission, the Templar with his cross, the Austrian and Prussian grenadiers in full uniform, and Curtius and Dentatus with their battering-ram. We ought not to pass unnoticed the slain war-horse, who will no more

> "Roll his red eye, and rally for the fight;"

or the slain warrior who, while "lying on his bleeding breast," contrives to "stare ghastly and grimly on the skies." As to this last exploit, we can only say, as Dante did on a similar occasion,

> "Forse per forza gia di' parlasia
> Si stravolse cosi alcun del tutto:
> Ma io nol vidi, nè credo che sia." [1]

The tempest is thus described: —

> "But lo! around the marsh'lling clouds unite,
> Like thick battalions halting for the fight;
> The sun sinks back, the tempest spirits sweep
> Fierce through the air and flutter on the deep.
> Till from their caverns rush the maniac blasts,
> Tear the loose sails, and split the creaking masts,
> And the lash'd billows, rolling in a train,
> Rear their white heads, and race along the main!"

What, we should like to know, is the difference between the two operations which Mr. Robert Montgomery so accurately distinguishes from each other, the fierce sweeping of the tempest-spirits through the air, and the rushing of the maniac blasts from their caverns? And why does the former operation end exactly when the latter commences?

[1] ["Perchance indeed by violence of palsy
Some one has been thus wholly turned awry;
But I ne'er saw it, nor believe it can be." — Longfellow's translation of *Inferno*, XX., 16–18.]

We cannot stop over each of Mr. Robert Montgomery's descriptions. We have a shipwrecked sailor, who "visions a viewless temple in the air"; a murderer who stands on a heath, "with ashy lips, in cold convulsion spread"; a pious man, to whom, as he lies in bed at night,

> "The panorama of past life appears,
> Warms his pure mind, and melts it into tears;"

a traveller, who loses his way, owing to the thickness of the "cloud battalion," and the want of "heaven-lamps, to beam their holy light." We have a description of a convicted felon, stolen from that incomparable passage in Crabbe's *Borough*, which has made many a rough and cynical reader cry like a child. We can, however, conscientiously declare that persons of the most excitable sensibility may safely venture upon Mr. Robert Montgomery's version. Then we have the "poor, mindless, pale-faced maniac boy," who

> "Rolls his vacant eye,
> To greet the glowing fancies of the sky."

What are the glowing fancies of the sky? And what is the meaning of the two lines which almost immediately follow?

> "A soulless thing, a spirit of the woods,
> He loves to commune with the fields and floods."

How can a soulless thing be a spirit? Then comes a panegyric on the Sunday. A baptism follows; after that a marriage: and we then proceed, in due course, to the visitation of the sick, and the burial of the dead.

Often as Death has been personified, Mr. Montgomery has found something new to say about him: —

> "O Death! thou dreadless vanquisher of earth,
> The Elements shrank blasted at thy birth!
> Careering round the world like tempest wind,
> Martyrs before, and victims strew'd behind;
> Ages on ages cannot grapple thee,
> Dragging the world into eternity!"

If there be any one line in this passage about which we are more in the dark than about the rest, it is the fourth. What the difference may be between the victims and the martyrs, and why the

martyrs are to lie before Death, and the victims behind him, are to us great mysteries.

We now come to the third part, of which we may say with honest Cassio, "Why, this is a more excellent song than the other." Mr. Robert Montgomery is very severe on the infidels, and undertakes to prove, that, as he elegantly expresses it,

> "One great Enchanter helm'd the harmonious whole."

What an enchanter has to do with helming, or what a helm has to do with harmony, he does not explain. He proceeds with his argument thus: —

> "And dare men dream that dismal Chance has framed
> All that the eye perceives, or tongue has named;
> The spacious world, and all its wonders, born
> Designless, self-created, and forlorn;
> Like to the flashing bubbles on a stream,
> Fire from the cloud, or phantom in a dream?"

We should be sorry to stake our faith in a higher Power on Mr. Robert Montgomery's logic. He informs us that lightning is designless and self-created. If he can believe this, we cannot conceive why he may not believe that the whole universe is designless and self-created. A few lines before, he tells us that it is the Deity who bids "thunder rattle from the skiey deep." His theory is therefore this, that God made the thunder, but that the lightning made itself.

But Mr. Robert Montgomery's metaphysics are not at present our game. He proceeds to set forth the fearful effects of Atheism: —

> "Then, blood-stain'd Murder, bare thy hideous arm,
> And thou, Rebellion, welter in thy storm:
> Awake, ye spirits of avenging crime;
> Burst from your bonds, and battle with the time!"

Mr. Robert Montgomery is fond of personification, and belongs, we need not say, to that school of poets who hold that nothing more is necessary to a personification in poetry than to begin a word with a capital letter. Murder may, without impropriety, bare her arm, as she did long ago, in Mr. Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope*. But what possible motive Rebellion can have for weltering in her storm, what avenging crime may be, who its spirits

may be, why they should be burst from their bonds, what their bonds may be, why they should battle with the time, what the time may be, and what a battle between the time and the spirits of avenging crime would resemble, we must confess ourselves quite unable to understand.

> "And here let Memory turn her tearful glance
> On the dark horrors of tumultuous France,
> When blood and blasphemy defiled her land,
> And fierce Rebellion shook her savage hand."

Whether Rebellion shakes her own hand, shakes the hand of Memory, or shakes the hand of France, or what any one of these three metaphors would mean, we know no more than we know what is the sense of the following passage: —

> "Let the foul orgies of infuriate crime
> Picture the raging havoc of that time,
> When leagued Rebellion march'd to kindle man,
> Fright in her rear, and Murder in her van.
> And thou, sweet flower of Austria, slaughter'd Queen,
> Who dropp'd no tear upon the dreadful scene,
> When gush'd the life-blood from thine angel form,
> And martyr'd beauty perish'd in the storm,
> Once worshipp'd paragon of all who saw,
> Thy look obedience, and thy smile a law."

What is the distinction between the foul orgies and the raging havoc which the foul orgies are to picture? Why does Fright go behind Rebellion, and Murder before? Why should not Murder fall behind Fright? Or why should not all the three walk abreast? We have read of a hero who had

> "Amazement in his van, with flight combined,
> And Sorrow's faded form, and Solitude behind."

Gray, we suspect, could have given a reason for disposing the allegorical attendants of Edward thus. But to proceed, "Flower of Austria" is stolen from Byron. "Dropp'd" is false English. "Perish'd in the storm" means nothing at all; and "thy look obedience" means the very reverse of what Mr. Robert Montgomery intends to say.

Our poet then proceeds to demonstrate the immortality of the soul: —

> "And shall the soul, the fount of reason, die,
> When dust and darkness round its temple lie?
> Did God breathe in it no ethereal fire,
> Dimless and quenchless, though the breath expire?"

The soul is a fountain; and therefore it is not to die, though dust and darkness lie round its temple, because an ethereal fire has been breathed into it, which cannot be quenched though its breath expire. Is it the fountain, or the temple, that breathes, and has fire breathed into it?

Mr. Montgomery apostrophizes the

> "Immortal beacons, — spirits of the just," —

and describes their employments in another world, which are to be, it seems, bathing in light, hearing fiery streams flow, and riding on living cars of lightning. The death-bed of the sceptic is described with what we suppose is meant for energy. We then have the death-bed of a Christian made as ridiculous as false imagery and false English can make it. But this is not enough. The Day of Judgment is to be described, and a roaring cataract of nonsense is poured forth upon this tremendous subject. Earth, we are told, is dashed into Eternity. Furnace blazes wheel round the horizon, and burst into bright wizard phantoms. Racing hurricanes unroll and whirl quivering fire-clouds. The white waves gallop. Shadowy worlds career around. The red and raging eye of Imagination is then forbidden to pry further. But further Mr. Robert Montgomery persists in prying. The stars bound through the airy roar. The unbosomed deep yawns on the ruin. The billows of Eternity then begin to advance. The world glares in fiery slumber. A car comes forward driven by living thunder,

> "Creation shudders with sublime dismay,
> And in a blazing tempest whirls away."

And this is fine poetry! This is what ranks its writer with the master-spirits of the age! This is what has been described, over and over again, in terms which would require some qualification if used respecting *Paradise Lost!* It is too much that this patchwork, made by stitching together old odds and ends of what, when new, was but tawdry frippery, is to be picked off the dung-hill on which it ought to rot, and to be held up to admiration as an inestimable specimen of art. And what must we think of a

system by means of which verses like those which we have quoted, verses fit only for the poet's corner of the *Morning Post*, can produce emolument and fame? The circulation of this writer's poetry has been greater than that of Southey's *Roderick*, and beyond all comparison greater than that of Cary's *Dante* or of the best works of Coleridge. Thus encouraged, Mr. Robert Montgomery has favoured the public with volume after volume. We have given so much space to the examination of his first and most popular performance that we have none to spare for his *Universal Prayer*, and his smaller poems, which, as the puffing journals tell us, would alone constitute a sufficient title to literary immortality. We shall pass at once to his last publication, entitled *Satan*.

This poem was ushered into the world with the usual roar of acclamation. But the thing was now past a joke. Pretensions so unfounded, so impudent, and so successful, had aroused a spirit of resistance. In several magazines and reviews, accordingly, *Satan* has been handled somewhat roughly, and the arts of the puffers have been exposed with good sense and spirit. We shall, therefore, be very concise.

Of the two poems we rather prefer that on the *Omnipresence of the Deity*, for the same reason which induced Sir Thomas More to rank one bad book above another. "Marry, this is somewhat. This is rhyme. But the other is neither rhyme nor reason." *Satan* is a long soliloquy, which the Devil pronounces in five or six thousand lines of bad blank verse, concerning geography, politics, newspapers, fashionable society, theatrical amusements, Sir Walter Scott's novels, Lord Byron's poetry, and Mr. Martin's pictures. The new designs for Milton have, as was natural, particularly attracted the attention of a personage who occupies so conspicuous a place in them. Mr. Martin must be pleased to learn that, whatever may be thought of those performances on earth, they give full satisfaction in Pandæmonium, and that he is there thought to have hit off the likenesses of the various Thrones and Dominations very happily.

The motto to the poem of *Satan* is taken from the Book of Job: "Whence comest thou? From going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it." And certainly Mr. Robert Montgomery has not failed to make his hero go to and fro, and walk up and down. With the exception, however, of this propensity to locomotion, Satan has not one Satanic quality. Mad Tom had

told us that "the prince of darkness is a gentleman"; but we had yet to learn that he is a respectable and pious gentleman, whose principal fault is that he is something of a twaddle and far too liberal of his good advice. That happy change in his character which Origen anticipated, and of which Tillotson did not despair, seems to be rapidly taking place. Bad habits are not eradicated in a moment. It is not strange, therefore, that so old an offender should now and then relapse for a short time into wrong dispositions. But to give him his due, as the proverb recommends, we must say that he always returns, after two or three lines of impiety, to his preaching style. We would seriously advise Mr. Montgomery to omit or alter about a hundred lines in different parts of this large volume, and to republish it under the name of *Gabriel*. The reflections of which it consists would come less absurdly, as far as there is a more and a less in extreme absurdity, from a good than from a bad angel.

We can afford room only for a single quotation. We give one taken at random, neither worse nor better, as far as we can perceive, than any other equal number of lines in the book. The Devil goes to the play, and moralizes thereon as follows: —

> "Music and Pomp their mingling spirit shed
> Around me: beauties in their cloud-like robes
> Shine forth, — a scenic paradise, it glares
> Intoxication through the reeling sense
> Of flush'd enjoyment. In the motley host
> Three prime gradations may be rank'd: the first,
> To mount upon the wings of Shakespeare's mind,
> And win a flash of his Promethean thought, —
> To smile and weep, to shudder, and achieve
> A round of passionate omnipotence,
> Attend: the second, are a sensual tribe,
> Convened to hear romantic harlots sing,
> On forms to banquet a lascivious gaze,
> While the bright perfidy of wanton eyes
> Through brain and spirit darts delicious fire:
> The last, a throng most pitiful! who seem,
> With their corroded figures, rayless glance,
> And death-like struggle of decaying age,
> Like painted skeletons in charnel pomp
> Set forth to satirize the human kind! —
> How fine a prospect for demoniac view!
> 'Creatures whose souls outbalance worlds awake!'
> Methinks I hear a pitying angel cry."

Here we conclude. If our remarks give pain to Mr. Robert Montgomery, we are sorry for it. But, at whatever cost of pain

to individuals, literature must be purified from this taint. And, to show that we are not actuated by any feeling of personal enmity towards him, we hereby give notice that, as soon as any book shall, by means of puffing, reach a second edition, our intention is to do unto the writer of it as we have done unto Mr. Robert Montgomery.

V

WALTER BAGEHOT

(1826–1877)

CHARLES DICKENS [1]

[First published in 1858. From *Literary Studies*, Volume 2]

It must give Mr. Dickens much pleasure to look at the collected series of his writings. He has told us of the beginnings of *Pickwick*.

"I was," he relates in what is now the preface to that work, "a young man of three and twenty, when the present publishers, attracted by some pieces I was at that time writing in the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper (of which one series had lately been collected and published in two volumes, illustrated by my esteemed friend Mr. George Cruikshank), waited upon me to propose a something that should be published in shilling numbers -- then only known to me, or I believe to anybody else, by a dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, which used, some five and twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars, and over some of which I remember to have shed innumerable tears, before I served my apprenticeship to Life. When I opened my door in Furnival's Inn to the managing partner who represented the firm, I recognized in him the person from whose hands I had bought, two or three years previously, and whom I had never seen before or since, my first copy of the magazine in which my first effusion — dropped stealthily one evening at twilight, with fear and trembling, into a dark letter-box, in a dark office, up a dark court in Fleet Street -- appeared in all the glory of print; on which occasion, by-the-bye, — how well I recollect it! — I walked down to Westminster Hall, and turned into it for half an hour, because my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride, that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there. I told my visitor of the coincidence, which we both hailed as a good omen; and so fell to business."

[1] Cheap Edition of the Works of Charles Dickens. *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, etc. London, 1857–8. Chapman and Hall.

After such a beginning, there must be great enjoyment in looking at the long series of closely printed green volumes, in remembering their marvellous popularity, in knowing that they are a familiar literature wherever the English language is spoken, — that they are read with admiring appreciation by persons of the highest culture at the centre of civilization, — that they amuse, and are fit to amuse, the roughest settler in Vancouver's Island.

The penetrating power of this remarkable genius among all classes at home is not inferior to its diffusive energy abroad. The phrase "household book" has, when applied to the works of Mr. Dickens, a peculiar propriety. There is no contemporary English writer, whose works are read so generally through the whole house, who can give pleasure to the servants as well as to the mistress, to the children as well as to the master. Mr. Thackeray without doubt exercises a more potent and plastic fascination within his sphere, but that sphere is limited. It is restricted to that part of the middle class which gazes inquisitively at the "Vanity Fair" world. The delicate touches of our great satirist have, for such readers, not only the charm of wit, but likewise the interest of valuable information; he tells them of the topics which they want to know. But below this class there is another and far larger, which is incapable of comprehending the idling world, or of appreciating the accuracy of delineations drawn from it, — which would not know the difference between a picture of Grosvenor Square by Mr. Thackeray and the picture of it in a Minerva-Press novel, — which only cares for or knows of its own multifarious, industrial, fig-selling world, — and over these also Mr. Dickens has power.

It cannot be amiss to take this opportunity of investigating, even slightly, the causes of so great a popularity. And if, in the course of our article, we may seem to be ready with over-refining criticism, or to be unduly captious with theoretical objections, we hope not to forget that so great and so diffused an influence is a *datum* for literary investigation, — that books which have been thus *tried* upon mankind and have thus succeeded, must be books of immense genius, — and that it is our duty as critics to explain, as far as we can, the nature and the limits of that genius, but never for one moment to deny or question its existence.

Men of genius may be divided into regular and irregular. Certain minds, the moment we think of them, suggest to us the ideas of symmetry and proportion. Plato's name, for example, calls

up at once the impression of something ordered, measured, and settled: it is the exact contrary of everything eccentric, immature, or undeveloped. The opinions of such a mind are often erroneous, and some of them may, from change of time, of intellectual *data*, or from chance, seem not to be quite worthy of it; but the mode in which those opinions are expressed, and (as far as we can make it out) the mode in which they are framed, affect us, as we have said, with a sensation of symmetricalness. It is not very easy to define exactly to what peculiar internal characteristic this external effect is due: the feeling is distinct, but the cause is obscure; it lies hid in the peculiar constitution of great minds, and we should not wonder that it is not very easy either to conceive or to describe. On the whole, however, the effect seems to be produced by a peculiar proportionateness, in each instance, of the mind to the tasks which it undertakes, amid which we see it, and by which we measure it. Thus we feel that the powers and tendencies of Plato's mind and nature were more fit than those of any other philosopher for the due consideration and exposition of the highest problems of philosophy, of the doubts and difficulties which concern man as man. His genius was adapted to its element; and change would mar the delicacy of the thought, or the polished accuracy of the expression. The weapon was fitted to its aim. Every instance of proportionateness does not, however, lead us to attribute this peculiar symmetry to the whole mind we are observing. The powers must not only be suited to the task undertaken, but the task itself must also be suited to a human being, and employ all the marvellous faculties with which he is endowed. The neat perfection of such a mind as Talleyrand's is the antithesis to the symmetry of genius; the niceties neither of diplomacy nor of conversation give scope to the entire powers of a great nature. We may lay down as the condition of a regular or symmetrical genius, that it should have the exact combination of powers suited to graceful and easy success in an exercise of mind great enough to task the whole intellectual nature.

On the other hand, men of irregular or unsymmetrical genius are eminent either for some one or some few peculiarities of mind, have possibly special defects on other sides of their intellectual nature, at any rate want what the scientific men of the present day would call the *definite proportion* of faculties and qualities suited to the exact work they have in hand. The foundation of many criticisms of Shakespeare is, that he is deficient in this

peculiar proportion. His overteeming imagination gives at times, and not unfrequently, a great feeling of irregularity; there seems to be confusion. We have the tall trees of the forest, the majestic creations of the highest genius; but we have, besides, a bushy second growth, an obtrusion of secondary images and fancies, which prevent our taking an exact measure of such grandeur. We have not the sensation of intense simplicity, which must probably accompany the highest conceivable greatness. Such is also the basis of Mr. Hallam's criticism on Shakespeare's language,[1] which Mr. Arnold has lately revived.[2] "His expression is often faulty," because his illustrative imagination, somewhat predominating over his other faculties, diffuses about the main expression a supplement of minor metaphors which sometimes distract the comprehension, and almost always deprive his style of the charm that arises from undeviating directness. Doubtless this is an instance of the very highest kind of irregular genius, in which all the powers exist in the mind in a very high, and almost all of them in the very highest measure, but in which from a slight excess in a single one, the charm of proportion is lessened. The most ordinary cases of irregular genius are those in which single faculties are abnormally developed, and call off the attention from all the rest of the mind by their prominence and activity. Literature, as the "fragment of fragments," is so full of the fragments of such minds that it is needless to specify instances.

Possibly it may be laid down that one of two elements is essential to a symmetrical mind. It is evident that such a mind must either apply itself to that which is theoretical or that which is practical, to the world of abstraction or to the world of objects and realities. In the former case the deductive understanding, which masters first principles, and makes deductions from them, the thin ether of the intellect, — the "mind itself by itself," — must evidently assume a great prominence. To attempt to comprehend principles without it, is to try to swim without arms, or to fly without wings. Accordingly, in the mind of Plato, and in others like him, the abstract and deducing understanding fills a great place; the imagination seems a kind of eye to descry its data; the artistic instinct an arranging impulse, which sets in order its inferences and conclusions. On the other hand, if a symmetrical mind busy itself with the active side of human life,

[1] *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, Vol. II, Chapter VI.
[2] Preface to Matthew Arnold's *Poems*.

with the world of concrete men and real things, its principal quality will be a practical sagacity, which forms with ease a distinct view and just appreciation of all the mingled objects that the world presents, — which allots to each its own place, and its intrinsic and appropriate rank. Possibly no mind gives such an idea of this sort of symmetry as Chaucer's. Everything in it seems in its place. A healthy sagacious man of the world has gone through the world; he loves it, and knows it; he dwells on it with fond appreciation; every object of the old life of "merry England" seems to fall into its precise niche in his ordered and symmetrical comprehension. The prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* is in itself a series of memorial tablets to mediæval society; each class has its tomb, and each its apt inscription. A man without such an apprehensive and broad sagacity must fail in every extensive delineation of various life; he might attempt to describe what he did not penetrate, or if by a rare discretion he avoided that mistake, his works would want the *binding element;* he would be deficient in that distinct sense of relation and combination which is necessary for the depiction of the whole of life, which gives to it unity at first, and imparts to it a mass in the memory ever afterwards. And eminence in one or other of these marking faculties — either in the deductive abstract intellect, or the practical seeing sagacity — seems essential to the mental constitution of a symmetrical genius, at least in man. There are, after all, but two principal all-important spheres in human life — thought and action; and we can hardly conceive of a masculine mind symmetrically developed, which did not evince its symmetry by an evident perfection in one or other of those pursuits, which did not leave the trace of its distinct reflection upon the one, or of its large insight upon the other of them. Possibly it may be thought that in the sphere of pure art there may be room for a symmetrical development different from these; but it will perhaps be found, on examination of such cases, either that under peculiar and appropriate disguises one of these great qualities is present, or that the apparent symmetry is the narrow perfection of a limited nature, which may be most excellent in itself, as in the stricter form of sacred art, but which, as we explained, is quite opposed to that broad perfection of the thinking being, to which we have applied the name of the symmetry of genius.

If this classification of men of genius be admitted, there can be no hesitation in assigning to Mr. Dickens his place in it. His genius

is essentially irregular and unsymmetrical. Hardly any English writer perhaps is much more so. His style is an example of it. It is descriptive, racy, and flowing; it is instinct with new imagery and singular illustration; but it does not indicate that due proportion of the faculties to one another which is a beauty in itself, and which cannot help diffusing beauty over every happy word and moulded clause. We may choose an illustration at random. The following graphic description will do: —

"If Lord George Gordon had appeared in the eyes of Mr. Willet, overnight, a nobleman of somewhat quaint and odd exterior, the impression was confirmed this morning, and increased a hundred-fold. Sitting bolt upright upon his bony steed, with his long, straight hair dangling about his face and fluttering in the wind; his limbs all angular and rigid, his elbows stuck out on either side ungracefully, and his whole frame jogged and shaken at every motion of his horse's feet; a more grotesque or more ungainly figure can hardly be conceived. In lieu of whip, he carried in his hand a great gold-headed cane, as large as any footman carries in these days; and his various modes of holding this unwieldy weapon — now upright before his face like the sabre of a horse-soldier, now over his shoulder like a musket, now between his finger and thumb, but always in some uncouth and awkward fashion — contributed in no small degree to the absurdity of his appearance. Stiff, lank, and solemn, dressed in an unusual manner, and ostentatiously exhibiting — whether by design or accident — all his peculiarities of carriage, gesture, and conduct, all the qualities, natural and artificial, in which he differed from other men, he might have moved the sternest looker-on to laughter, and fully provoked the smiles and whispered jests which greeted his departure from the Maypole Inn.

"Quite unconscious, however, of the effect he produced, he trotted on beside his secretary, talking to himself nearly all the way, until they came within a mile or two of London, when now and then some passenger went by who knew him by sight, and pointed him out to some one else, and perhaps stood looking after him, or cried in jest or earnest as it might be, 'Hurrah, Geordie! No Popery!' At which he would gravely pull off his hat and bow. When they reached the town and rode along the streets, these notices became more frequent; some laughed, some hissed, some turned their heads and smiled, some wondered who he was, some ran along the pavement by his side and cheered. When this happened in a crush of carts and chairs and coaches, he would make a dead stop, and pulling off his hat, cry, 'Gentlemen, No Popery!' to which the gentlemen would respond with lusty voices, and with three times three; and then on he would go again with a score or so of the raggedest following at his horse's heels, and shouting till their throats were parched.

"The old ladies too — there were a great many old ladies in the streets, and these all knew him. Some of them — not those of the highest rank, but such as sold fruit from baskets and carried burdens — clapped their shrivelled hands, and raised a weazen, piping, shrill 'Hurrah, my lord.' Others waved their hands or handkerchiefs, or shook their fans or parasols, or threw up windows, and called in haste to those within to come and see.

All these marks of popular esteem he received with profound gravity and respect; bowing very low, and so frequently that his hat was more off his head than on; and looking up at the houses as he passed along, with the air of one who was making a public entry, and yet was not puffed-up or proud." [1]

No one would think of citing such a passage as this, as exemplifying the proportioned beauty of finished writing; it is not the writing of an evenly developed or of a highly cultured mind; it abounds in jolts and odd turns; it is full of singular twists and needless complexities: but, on the other hand, no one can deny its great and peculiar merit. It is an odd style, and it is very odd how much you read it. It is the overflow of a copious mind, though not the chastened expression of a harmonious one.

The same quality characterizes the matter of his works. His range is very varied. He has attempted to describe every kind of scene in English life, from quite the lowest to almost the highest. He has not endeavoured to secure success by confining himself to a single path, nor wearied the public with repetitions of the subjects by the delineation of which he originally obtained fame. In his earlier works he never writes long without saying something well; something which no other man would have said; but even in them it is the characteristic of his power that it is apt to fail him at once; from masterly strength we pass without interval to almost infantine weakness, — something like disgust succeeds in a moment to an extreme admiration. Such is the natural fate of an unequal mind employing itself on a vast and variegated subject. In writing on the Waverley Novels, we ventured to make a division of novels into the ubiquitous — it would have been perhaps better to say the miscellaneous — and the sentimental: the first, as its name implies, busying itself with the whole of human life, the second restricting itself within a peculiar and limited theme. Mr. Dickens's novels are all of the former class. They aim to delineate nearly all that part of our national life which can be delineated, — at least, within the limits which social morality prescribes to social art; but you cannot read his delineation of any part without being struck with its singular incompleteness. An artist once said of the best work of another artist: "Yes, it is a pretty patch." If we might venture on the phrase, we should say that Mr. Dickens's pictures are graphic scraps; his best books are compilations of them.

The truth is, that Mr. Dickens wholly wants the two elements

[1] *Barnaby Rudge*, Chapter XXXVII.

which we have spoken of, as one or other requisite for a symmetrical genius. He is utterly deficient in the faculty of reasoning. "Mamma, what shall I think about?" said the small girl. "My dear, don't think," was the old-fashioned reply. We do not allege that in the strict theory of education this was a correct reply; modern writers think otherwise; but we wish some one would say it to Mr. Dickens. He is often troubled with the idea that he must reflect, and his reflections are perhaps the worst reading in the world. There is a sentimental confusion about them; we never find the consecutive precision of mature theory, or the cold distinctness of clear thought. Vivid facts stand out in his imagination; and a fresh illustrative style brings them home to the imagination of his readers; but his continuous philosophy utterly fails in the attempt to harmonize them, — to educe a theory or elaborate a precept from them. Of his social thinking we shall have a few words to say in detail; his didactic humour is very unfortunate: no writer is less fitted for an excursion to the imperative mood. At present, we only say, what is so obvious as scarcely to need saying, that his abstract understanding is so far inferior to his picturesque imagination as to give even to his best works the sense of jar and incompleteness, and to deprive them altogether of the crystalline finish which is characteristic of the clear and cultured understanding.

Nor has Mr. Dickens the easy and various sagacity which, as has been said, gives a unity to all which it touches. He has, indeed, a quality which is near allied to it in appearance. His shrewdness in some things, especially in traits and small things, is wonderful. His works are full of acute remarks on petty doings, and well exemplify the telling power of minute circumstantiality. But the minor species of perceptive sharpness is so different from diffused sagacity, that the two scarcely ever are to be found in the same mind. There is nothing less like the great lawyer, acquainted with broad principles and applying them with distinct deduction, than the attorney's clerk who catches at small points like a dog biting at flies. "Over-sharpness" in the student is the most unpromising symptom of the logical jurist. You must not ask a horse in blinkers for a large view of a landscape. In the same way, a detective ingenuity in microscopic detail is of all mental qualities most unlike the broad sagacity by which the great painters of human affairs have unintentionally stamped the mark of unity on their productions. They show by their

treatment of each case that they understand the whole of life; the special delineator of fragments and points shows that he understands them only. In one respect the defect is more striking in Mr. Dickens than in any other novelist of the present day. The most remarkable deficiency in modern fiction is its omission of the business of life, of all those countless occupations, pursuits, and callings in which most men live and move, and by which they have their being. In most novels money *grows*. You have no idea of the toil, the patience, and the wearing anxiety by which men of action provide for the day, and lay up for the future, and support those that are given into their care. Mr. Dickens is not chargeable with this omission. He perpetually deals with the pecuniary part of life. Almost all his characters have determined occupations, of which he is apt to talk even at too much length. When he rises from the toiling to the luxurious classes, his genius in most cases deserts him. The delicate refinement and discriminating taste of the idling orders are not in his way; he knows the dry arches of London Bridge better than Belgravia. He excels in inventories of poor furniture, and is learned in pawnbrokers' tickets. But, although his creative power lives and works among the middle class and industrial section of English society, he has never painted the highest part of their daily intellectual life. He made, indeed, an attempt to paint specimens of the apt and able man of business in *Nicholas Nickleby;* but the Messrs. Cheeryble are among the stupidest of his characters. He forgot that breadth of platitude is rather different from breadth of sagacity. His delineations of middle-class life have in consequence a harshness and meanness which do not belong to that life in reality. He omits the relieving element. He describes the figs which are sold, but not the talent which sells figs well. And it is the same want of diffused sagacity in his own nature which has made his pictures of life so odd and disjointed, and which has deprived them of symmetry and unity.

The *bizarrerie* of Mr. Dickens's genius is rendered more remarkable by the inordinate measure of his special excellences. The first of these is his power of observation in detail. We have heard, — we do not know whether correctly or incorrectly, — that he can go down a crowded street, and tell you all that is in it, what each shop was, what the grocer's name was, how many scraps of orange-peel there were on the pavement. His works give you exactly the same idea. The amount of detail which

there is in them is something amazing, — to an ordinary writer something incredible. There are single pages containing telling *minutiæ*, which other people would have thought enough for a volume. Nor is his sensibility to external objects, though omnivorous, insensible to the artistic effect of each. There are scarcely anywhere such pictures of London as he draws. No writer has equally comprehended the artistic material which is given by its extent, its aggregation of different elements, its mouldiness, its brilliancy.

Nor does his genius — though, from some idiosyncrasy of mind or accident of external situation, it is more especially directed to city life — at all stop at the city wall. He is especially at home in the picturesque and obvious parts of country life, particularly in the comfortable and (so to say) mouldering portion of it. The following is an instance; if not the best that could be cited, still one of the best: —

"They arranged to proceed upon their journey next evening, as a stage-waggon, which travelled for some distance on the same road as they must take, would stop at the inn to change horses, and the driver for a small gratuity would give Nell a place inside. A bargain was soon struck when the waggon came; and in due time it rolled away; with the child comfortably bestowed among the softer packages, her grandfather and the schoolmaster walking on beside the driver, and the landlady and all the good folks of the inn screaming out their good wishes and farewells.

"What a soothing, luxurious, drowsy way of travelling, to lie inside that slowly-moving mountain, listening to the tinkling of the horses' bells, the occasional smacking of the carter's whip, the smooth rolling of the great broad wheels, the rattle of the harness, the cheery good-nights of passing travellers jogging past on little short-stepped horses — all made pleasantly indistinct by the thick awning, which seemed made for lazy listening under, till one fell asleep! The very going to sleep, still with an indistinct idea, as the head jogged to and fro upon the pillow, of moving onward with no trouble or fatigue, and hearing all these sounds like dreamy music, lulling to the senses — and the slow waking up, and finding one's self staring out through the breezy curtain half-opened in the front, far up into the cold bright sky with its countless stars, and downwards at the driver's lantern dancing on like its namesake Jack of the swamps and marshes, and sideways at the dark grim trees, and forward at the long bare road rising up, up, up, until it stopped abruptly at a sharp high ridge as if there were no more road, and all beyond was sky — and the stopping at the inn to bait, and being helped out, and going into a room with fire and candles, and winking very much, and being agreeably reminded that the night was cold, and anxious for very comfort's sake to think it colder than it was! What a delicious journey was that journey in the waggon!

"Then the going on again — so fresh at first, and shortly afterwards so sleepy. The waking from a sound nap as the mail came dashing past like a

highway comet, with gleaming lamps and rattling hoofs, and visions of a guard behind, standing up to keep his feet warm, and of a gentleman in a fur cap opening his eyes and looking wild and stupefied — the stopping at the turnpike, where the man has gone to bed, and knocking at the door until he answered with a smothered shout from under the bed-clothes in the little room above, where the faint light was burning, and presently came down, night-capped and shivering, to throw the gate wide open, and wish all waggons off the road except by day. The cold sharp interval between night and morning — the distant streak of light widening and spreading, and turning from grey to white, and from white to yellow, and from yellow to burning red — the presence of day, with all its cheerfulness and life — men and horses at the plough — birds in the trees and hedges, and boys in solitary fields frightening them away with rattles. The coming to a town — people busy in the market; light carts and chaises round the tavern yard; tradesmen standing at their doors; men running horses up and down the street for sale; pigs plunging and grunting in the dirty distance, getting off with long strings at their legs, running into clean chemists' shops and being dislodged with brooms by 'prentices; the night-coach changing horses — the passengers cheerless, cold, ugly, and discontented, with three months' growth of hair in one night — the coachman fresh as from a bandbox, and exquisitely beautiful by contrast: — so much bustle, so many things in motion, such a variety of incidents — when was there a journey with so many delights as that journey in the waggon!" [1]

Or, as a relief from a very painful series of accompanying characters, it is pleasant to read and remember the description of the fine morning on which Mr. Jonas Chuzzlewit does not reflect. Mr. Dickens has, however, no feeling analogous to the nature-worship of some other recent writers. There is nothing Wordsworthian in his bent; the interpreting inspiration (as that school speak) is not his. Nor has he the erudition in difficult names which has filled some pages in late novelists with mineralogy and botany. His descriptions of Nature are fresh and superficial; they are not sermonic or scientific.

Nevertheless, it may be said that Mr. Dickens's genius is especially suited to the delineation of city life. London is like a newspaper. Everything is there, and everything is disconnected. There is every kind of person in some houses; but there is no more connection between the houses than between the neighbours in the lists of "births, marriages, and deaths." As we change from the broad leader to the squalid police report, we pass a corner and we are in a changed world. This is advantageous to Mr. Dickens's genius. His memory is full of instances of old buildings and curious people, and he does not care to piece them

[1] *Old Curiosity Shop*, Chapter XLVI.

together. On the contrary, each scene, to his mind, is a separate scene, — each street a separate street. He has, too, the peculiar alertness of observation that is observable in those who live by it. He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity.

A second most wonderful special faculty which Mr. Dickens possesses is what we may call his *vivification* of character, or rather of characteristics. His marvellous power of observation has been exercised upon men and women even more than upon town or country; and the store of human detail, so to speak, in his books is endless and enormous. The boots at the inn, the pickpockets in the street, the undertaker, the Mrs. Gamp, are all of them at his disposal; he knows each trait and incident, and he invests them with a kind of perfection in detail which in reality they do not possess. He has a very peculiar power of taking hold of some particular traits, and making a character out of them. He is especially apt to incarnate particular professions in this way. Many of his people never speak without some allusion to their occupation. You cannot separate them from it. Nor does the writer ever separate them. What would Mr. Mould [1] be if not an undertaker? or Mrs. Gamp [2] if not a nurse? or Charley Bates [3] if not a pickpocket? Not only is human nature in them subdued to what it works in, but there seems to be no nature to subdue; the whole character is the idealization of a trade, and is not in fancy or thought distinguishable from it. Accordingly, of necessity, such delineations become caricatures. We do not in general contrast them with reality; but as soon as we do, we are struck with the monstrous exaggerations which they present. You could no more fancy Sam Weller, or Mark Tapley, or the Artful Dodger [4] really existing, walking about among common ordinary men and women, than you can fancy a talking duck or a writing bear. They are utterly beyond the pale of ordinary social intercourse. We suspect, indeed, that Mr. Dickens does not conceive his characters to himself as mixing in the society he mixes in. He sees people in the street, doing certain things, talking in a certain way, and his fancy petrifies them in the act. He goes on fancying hundreds of reduplications of that act and that speech; he frames an existence in which there is nothing else but that aspect which attracted his attention. Sam Weller is an example. He is a man-servant, who makes a

[1] In *Martin Chuzzlewit.* [2] *Ibid.* [3] In *Oliver Twist.*
[4] In the *Pickwick Papers*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and *Oliver Twist.*

peculiar kind of jokes, and is wonderfully felicitous in certain similes. You see him at his first introduction: —

"'My friend,' said the thin gentleman.

"'You're one o' the advice gratis order,' thought Sam, 'or you wouldn't be so werry fond o' me all at once.' But he only said — 'Well, sir?'

"'My friend,' said the thin gentleman, with a conciliatory hem — 'have you got many people stopping here, now? Pretty busy? Eh?'

"Sam stole a look at the inquirer. He was a little high-dried man, with a dark squeezed-up face, and small restless black eyes, that kept winking and twinkling on each side of his little inquisitive nose, as if they were playing a perpetual game of peep-bo with that feature. He was dressed all in black, with boots as shiny as his eyes, a low white neckcloth, and a clean shirt with a frill to it. A gold watch-chain and seals depended from his fob. He carried his black kid gloves *in* his hands, not *on* them; and, as he spoke, thrust his wrists beneath his coat-tails, with the air of a man who was in the habit of propounding some regular posers.

"'Pretty busy, eh?' said the little man.

"'Oh, werry well, sir,' replied Sam, 'we shan't be bankrupts, and we shan't make our fort'ns. We eat our biled mutton without capers, and don't care for horse-radish wen ve can get beef.'

"'Ah,' said the little man, 'you're a wag, ain't you?'

"'My eldest brother was troubled with that complaint,' said Sam, 'it may be catching — I used to sleep with him.'

"'This is a curious old house of yours,' said the little man, looking round him.

"'If you'd sent word you was a-coming, we'd ha' had it repaired,' replied the imperturbable Sam.

"The little man seemed rather baffled by these several repulses, and a short consultation took place between him and the two plump gentlemen. At its conclusion, the little man took a pinch of snuff from an oblong silver box, and was apparently on the point of renewing the conversation, when one of the plump gentlemen, who, in addition to a benevolent countenance, possessed a pair of spectacles and a pair of black gaiters, interfered —

"'The fact of the matter is,' said the benevolent gentleman, 'that my friend here' (pointing to the other plump gentleman) 'will give you half a guinea, if you'll answer one or two ——'

"'Now, my dear sir — my dear sir,' said the little man, 'pray allow me — my dear sir, the very first principle to be observed in these cases is this: if you place a matter in the hands of a professional man, you must in no way interfere in the progress of the business; you must repose implicit confidence in him. Really, Mr.' (he turned to the other plump gentleman, and said) — 'I forget your friend's name.'

"'Pickwick,' said Mr. Wardle, for it was no other than that jolly personage.

"'Ah, Pickwick — really Mr. Pickwick, my dear sir, excuse me — I shall be happy to receive any private suggestions of yours, as *amicus curiæ*, but you must see the impropriety of your interfering with my conduct in this case, with such an *ad captandum* argument as the offer of half a guinea. Really, my dear sir, really,' and the little man took an argumentative pinch of snuff, and looked very profound.

"'My only wish, sir,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'was to bring this very unpleasant matter to as speedy a close as possible.'

"'Quite right — quite right,' said the little man.

"'With which view,' continued Mr. Pickwick, 'I made use of the argument which my experience of men has taught me is the most likely to succeed in any case.'

"'Ay, ay,' said the little man, 'very good, very good indeed; but you should have suggested it to *me*. My dear sir, I'm quite certain you cannot be ignorant of the extent of confidence which must be placed in professional men. If any authority can be necessary on such a point, my dear sir, let me refer you to the well-known case in Barnwell and ——'

"'Never mind George Barnwell,' interrupted Sam, who had remained a wondering listener during this short colloquy; 'everybody knows vat sort of a case his was, tho' it's always been my opinion, mind you, that the young 'ooman deserved scragging a precious sight more than he did. Hows'ever, that's neither here nor there. You want me to except of half a guinea. Werry well, I'm agreeable: I can't say no fairer than that, can I, sir?' (Mr. Pickwick smiled.) 'Then the next question is, what the devil do you want with me? as the man said wen he see the ghost.'

"'We want to know ——' said Mr. Wardle.

"'Now, my dear sir — my dear sir,' interposed the busy little man.

"Mr. Wardle shrugged his shoulders and was silent.

"'We want to know,' said the little man solemnly; 'and we ask the question of you, in order that we may not awaken apprehensions inside — we want to know who you've got in this house at present.'

"'Who there is in the house!" said Sam, in whose mind the inmates were always represented by that particular article of their costume which came under his immediate superintendence. 'There's a wooden leg in number six; there's a pair of Hessians in thirteen; there's two pair of halves in the commercial; there's these here painted tops in the snuggery inside the bar; and five more tops in the coffee-room.'

"'Nothing more?' said the little man.

"'Stop a bit,' replied Sam, suddenly recollecting himself. 'Yes; there's a pair of Wellingtons a good deal worn, and a pair o' lady's shoes, in number five.'

"'What sort of shoes?' hastily inquired Wardle, who, together with Mr. Pickwick, had been lost in bewilderment at the singular catalogue of visitors.

"'Country make,' replied Sam.

"'Any maker's name?'

"'Brown.'

"'Where of?'

"'Muggleton.'

"'It *is* them,' exclaimed Wardle. 'By Heavens, we've found them.'

"'Hush!' said Sam. 'The Wellingtons has gone to Doctors Commons.'

"'No,' said the little man.

"'Yes, for a license.'

"'We're in time,' exclaimed Wardle. 'Show us the room; not a moment is to be lost.'

"'Pray, my dear sir — pray,' said the little man; 'caution, caution.' He drew from his pocket a red silk purse, and looked very hard at Sam as he drew out a sovereign.

"Sam grinned expressively.

"'Show us into the room at once, without announcing us,' said the little man, 'and it's yours.'" [1]

One can fancy Mr. Dickens hearing a dialogue of this sort, — not nearly so good, but something like it, — and immediately setting to work to make it better and put it in a book; then changing a little the situation, putting the boots one step up in the scale of service, engaging him as footman to a stout gentleman (but without for a moment losing sight of the peculiar kind of professional conversation and humour which his first dialogue presents), and astonishing all his readers by the marvellous fertility and magical humour with which he maintains that style. Sam Weller's father is even a stronger and simpler instance. He is simply nothing but an old coachman of the stout and extinct sort: you cannot separate him from the idea of that occupation. But how amusing he is! We dare not quote a single word of his talk; because we should go on quoting so long, and every one knows it so well. Some persons may think that this is not a very high species of delineative art. The idea of personifying traits and trades may seem to them poor and meagre. Anybody, they may fancy, can do that. But how would they do it? Whose fancy would not break down in a page — in five lines? Who can carry on the vivification with zest and energy and humour for volume after volume? Endless fertility in laughter-causing detail is Mr. Dickens's most astonishing peculiarity. It requires a continuous and careful reading of his works to be aware of his enormous wealth. Writers have attained the greatest reputation for wit and humour, whose whole works do not contain so much of either as are to be found in a very few pages of his.

Mr. Dickens's humour is indeed very much a result of the two peculiarities of which we have been speaking. His power of detailed observation and his power of idealizing individual traits of character — sometimes of one or other of them, sometimes of both of them together. His similes on matters of external observation are so admirable that everybody appreciates them, and it would be absurd to quote specimens of them; nor is it the sort of excellence which best bears to be paraded for the purposes of critical example. Its off-hand air and natural connection with the adjacent circumstances are inherent parts of its peculiar merit.

[1] *Pickwick Papers*, Chapter IX.

Every reader of Mr. Dickens's works knows well what we mean. And who is not a reader of them?

But his peculiar humour is even more indebted to his habit of vivifying external traits, than to his power of external observation. He, as we have explained, expands traits into people; and it is a source of true humour to place these, when so expanded, in circumstances in which only people — that is complete human beings — can appropriately act. The humour of Mr. Pickwick's character is entirely of this kind. He is a kind of incarnation of simple-mindedness and what we may call obvious-mindedness. The conclusion which each occurrence or position in life most immediately presents to the unsophisticated mind is that which Mr. Pickwick is sure to accept. The proper accompaniments are given to him. He is a stout gentleman in easy circumstances, who is irritated into originality by no impulse from within, and by no stimulus from without. He is stated to have "retired from business." But no one can fancy what he was in business. Such guileless simplicity of heart and easy impressibility of disposition would soon have induced a painful failure amid the harsh struggles and the tempting speculations of pecuniary life. As he is represented in the narrative, however, nobody dreams of such antecedents. Mr. Pickwick moves easily over all the surface of English life from Goswell Street to Dingley Dell, from Dingley Dell to the Ipswich elections, from drinking milk-punch in a wheelbarrow to sleeping in the approximate pound, and no one ever thinks of applying to him the ordinary maxims which we should apply to any common person in life, or to any common personage in a fiction. Nobody thinks it is wrong in Mr. Pickwick to drink too much milk-punch in a wheelbarrow, to introduce worthless people of whom he knows nothing to the families of people for whom he really cares; nobody holds him responsible for the consequences; nobody thinks there is anything wrong in his taking Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen to visit Mr. Winkle, senior, and thereby almost irretrievably offending him with his son's marriage. We do not reject moral remarks such as these, but they never occur to us. Indeed, the indistinct consciousness that such observations are possible, and that they are hovering about our minds, enhances the humour of the narrative. We are in a conventional world, where the mere maxims of common life do not apply, and yet which has all the amusing detail, and picturesque elements, and singular eccentricities of common

life. Mr. Pickwick is a personified ideal; a kind of amateur in life, whose course we watch through all the circumstances of ordinary existence, and at whose follies we are amused just as really skilled people are at the mistakes of an amateur in their art. His being in the pound is not wrong; his being the victim of Messrs. Dodson is not foolish. "Always shout with the mob," said Mr. Pickwick. "But suppose there are two mobs," said Mr. Snodgrass. "Then shout with the loudest," said Mr. Pickwick. This is not in him weakness or time-serving, or want of principle, as in most even of fictitious people it would be. It is his way. Mr. Pickwick was expected to say something, so he said "Ah!" in a grave voice. This is not pompous as we might fancy, or clever as it might be, if intentionally devised; it is simply his way. Mr. Pickwick gets late at night over the wall behind the back-door of a young-ladies' school, is found in that sequestered place by the schoolmistress and the boarders and the cook, and there is a dialogue between them.[1] There is nothing out of possibility in this; it is his way. The humour essentially consists in treating as a moral agent a being who really is not a moral agent. We treat a vivified accident as a man, and we are surprised at the absurd results. We are reading about an acting thing, and we wonder at its scrapes, and laugh at them as if they were those of the man. There is something of this humour in every sort of farce. Everybody knows these are not real beings acting in real life, though they talk as if they were, and want us to believe that they are. Here, as in Mr. Dickens's books, we have exaggerations pretending to comport themselves as ordinary beings, caricatures acting as if they were characters.

At the same time it is essential to remember, that however great may be and is the charm of such exaggerated personifications, the best specimens of them are immensely less excellent, belong to an altogether lower range of intellectual achievements, than the real depiction of actual living men. It is amusing to read of beings *out* of the laws of morality, but it is more profoundly interesting, as well as more instructive, to read of those whose life in its moral conditions resembles our own. We see this most distinctly when both representations are given by the genius of one and the same writer. Falstaff is a sort of sack-holding paunch, an exaggerated overdevelopment which no one thinks of holding down to the commonplace rules of the ten commandments and the statute-

[1] Chapter XVI.

law. We do not think of them in connection with him. They belong to a world apart. Accordingly, we are vexed when the king discards him and reproves him. Such a fate was a necessary adherence on Shakespeare's part to the historical tradition; he never probably thought of departing from it, nor would his audience have perhaps endured his doing so. But to those who look at the historical plays as pure works of imaginative art, it seems certainly an artistic misconception to have developed so marvellous an *un*moral impersonation, and then to have subjected it to an ethical and punitive judgment. Still, notwithstanding this error, which was very likely inevitable, Falstaff is probably the most remarkable specimen of caricature-representation to be found in literature. And its very excellence of execution only shows how inferior is the kind of art which creates only such representations. Who could compare the genius, marvellous as must be its fertility, which was needful to create a Falstaff, with that shown in the higher productions of the same mind in Hamlet, Ophelia, and Lear? We feel instantaneously the difference between the aggregating accident which rakes up from the externalities of life other accidents analogous to itself, and the central ideal of a real character which cannot show itself wholly in any accidents, but which exemplifies itself partially in many, which unfolds itself gradually in wide spheres of action, and yet, as with those we know best in life, leaves something hardly to be understood, and after years of familiarity is a problem and a difficulty to the last. In the same way, the embodied characteristics and grotesque exaggerations of Mr. Dickens, notwithstanding all their humour and all their marvellous abundance, can never be for a moment compared with the great works of the real painters of essential human nature.

There is one class of Mr. Dickens's pictures which may seem to form an exception to this criticism. It is the delineation of the outlaw, we might say the anti-law, world in *Oliver Twist.* In one or two instances Mr. Dickens has been so fortunate as to hit on characteristics which, by his system of idealization and continual repetition, might really be brought to look like a character. A man's trade or profession in regular life can only exhaust a very small portion of his nature; no approach is made to the essence of humanity by the exaggeration of the traits which typify a beadle or an undertaker. With the outlaw world it is somewhat different. The bare fact of a man belonging to the world is so

important to his nature, that if it is artistically developed with coherent accessories, some approximation to a distinctly natural character will be almost inevitably made. In the characters of Bill Sykes and Nancy this is so. The former is the skulking ruffian who may be seen any day at the police-courts, and whom any one may fancy he sees by walking through St. Giles's. You cannot attempt to figure to your imagination the existence of such a person without being thrown into the region of the passions, the will, and the conscience; the mere fact of his maintaining, as a condition of life and by settled profession, a struggle with regular society, necessarily brings these deep parts of his nature into prominence; great crime usually proceeds from abnormal impulses or strange effort. Accordingly, Mr. Sykes is the character most approaching to a coherent man who is to be found in Mr. Dickens's works. We do not say that even here there is not some undue heightening admixture of caricature, — but this defect is scarcely thought of amid the general coherence of the picture, the painful subject, and the wonderful command of strange accessories. Miss Nancy is a still more delicate artistic effort. She is an idealization of the girl who may also be seen at the police-courts and St. Giles's; as bad, according to occupation and common character, as a woman can be, yet retaining a tinge of womanhood, and a certain compassion for interesting suffering, which under favouring circumstances might be the germ of a regenerating influence. We need not stay to prove how much the imaginative development of such a personage must concern itself with our deeper humanity; how strongly, if excellent, it must be contrasted with everything conventional or casual or superficial. Mr. Dickens's delineation is in the highest degree excellent. It possesses not only the more obvious merits belonging to the subject, but also that of a singular delicacy of expression and idea. Nobody fancies for a moment that they are reading about anything beyond the pale of ordinary propriety. We read the account of the life which Miss Nancy leads with Bill Sykes without such an idea occurring to us; yet when we reflect upon it, few things in literary painting are more wonderful than the depiction of a professional life of sin and sorrow, so as not even to startle those to whom the deeper forms of either are but names and shadows. Other writers would have given as vivid a picture: Defoe would have poured out even a more copious measure of telling circumstantiality, but he would have narrated his story

with an inhuman distinctness, which if not impure is *un*pure; French writers, whom we need not name, would have enhanced the interest of their narrative by trading on the excitement of stimulating scenes. It would be injustice to Mr. Dickens to say that he has surmounted these temptations; the unconscious evidence of innumerable details proves that, from a certain delicacy of imagination and purity of spirit, he has not even experienced them. Criticism is the more bound to dwell at length on the merits of these delineations, because no artistic merit can make *Oliver Twist* a pleasing work. The squalid detail of crime and misery oppresses us too much. If it is to be read at all, it should be read in the first hardness of the youthful imagination, which no touch can move too deeply, and which is never stirred with tremulous suffering at the "still sad music of humanity." [1] The coldest critic in later life may never hope to have again the apathy of his boyhood.

It perhaps follows from what has been said of the characteristics of Mr. Dickens's genius, that it would be little skilled in planning plots for his novels. He certainly is not so skilled. He says in his preface to the *Pickwick Papers* "that they were designed for the introduction of diverting characters and incidents; that no ingenuity of plot was attempted, or even at that time considered feasible by the author in connection with the desultory plan of publication adopted;" and he adds an expression of regret that "these chapters had not been strung together on a thread of more general interest." It is extremely fortunate that no such attempt was made. In the cases in which Mr. Dickens has attempted to make a long connected story, or to develop into scenes or incidents a plan in any degree elaborate, the result has been a complete failure. A certain consistency of genius seems necessary for the construction of a consecutive plot. An irregular mind naturally shows itself in incoherency of incident and aberration of character. The method in which Mr. Dickens's mind works, if we are correct in our criticism upon it, tends naturally to these blemishes. Caricatures are necessarily isolated; they are produced by the exaggeration of certain conspicuous traits and features; each being is enlarged on its greatest side; and we laugh at the grotesque grouping and the startling contrast. But that connection between human beings on which a plot depends is rather severed than elucidated by the enhancement of their diversities. Interesting

[1] Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey."

stories are founded on the intimate relations of men and women. These intimate relations are based not on their superficial traits, or common occupations, or most visible externalities, but on the inner life of heart and feeling. You simply divert attention from that secret life by enhancing the perceptible diversities of common human nature, and the strange anomalies into which it may be distorted. The original germ of *Pickwick* was a "Club of Oddities." The idea was professedly abandoned; but traces of it are to be found in all Mr. Dickens's books. It illustrates the professed grotesqueness of the characters as well as their slender connection.

The defect of plot is heightened by Mr. Dickens's great, we might say complete, inability to make a love-story. A pair of lovers is by custom a necessity of narrative fiction, and writers who possess a great general range of mundane knowledge, and but little knowledge of the special sentimental subject, are often in amusing difficulties. The watchful reader observes the transition from the hearty description of well-known scenes, of prosaic streets, or journeys by wood and river, to the pale colours of ill-attempted poetry, to such sights as the novelist evidently wishes that he need not try to see. But few writers exhibit the difficulty in so aggravated a form as Mr. Dickens. Most men by taking thought can make a lay figure to look not so very unlike a young gentleman, and can compose a telling schedule of ladylike charms. Mr. Dickens has no power of doing either. The heroic character — we do not mean the form of character so called in life and action, but that which is hereditary in the heroes of novels — is not suited to his style of art. Hazlitt wrote an essay to inquire "Why the heroes of romances are insipid;" and without going that length it may safely be said that the character of the agreeable young gentleman who loves and is loved should not be of the most marked sort. Flirtation ought not to be an exaggerated pursuit. Young ladies and their admirers should not express themselves in the heightened and imaginative phraseology suited to Charley Bates and the Dodger. Humour is of no use, for no one makes love in jokes: a tinge of insidious satire may perhaps be permitted as a rare and occasional relief, but it will not be thought "a pretty book," if so malicious an element be at all habitually perceptible. The broad farce in which Mr. Dickens indulges is thoroughly out of place. If you caricature a pair of lovers ever so little, by the necessity of their calling you make them ridicu-

lous. One of Sheridan's best comedies [1] is remarkable for having no scene in which the hero and heroine are on the stage together; and Mr. Moore suggests [2] that the shrewd wit distrusted his skill in the light, dropping love-talk which would have been necessary. Mr. Dickens would have done well to imitate so astute a policy; but he has none of the managing shrewdness which those who look at Sheridan's career attentively will probably think not the least remarkable feature in his singular character. Mr. Dickens, on the contrary, pours out painful sentiments as if he wished the abundance should make up for the inferior quality. The excruciating writing which is expended on Miss Ruth Pinch [3] passes belief. Mr. Dickens is not only unable to make lovers talk, but to describe heroines in mere narrative. As has been said, most men can make a jumble of blue eyes and fair hair and pearly teeth, that does very well for a young lady, at least for a good while; but Mr. Dickens will not, probably cannot, attain even to this humble measure of descriptive art. He vitiates the repose by broad humour, or disenchants the delicacy by an unctuous admiration.

This deficiency is probably nearly connected with one of Mr. Dickens's most remarkable excellences. No one can read Mr. Thackeray's writings without feeling that he is perpetually treading as close as he dare to the border-line that separates the world which may be described in books from the world which it is prohibited so to describe. No one knows better than this accomplished artist where that line is, and how curious are its windings and turns. The charge against him is that he knows it but too well; that with an anxious care and a wistful eye he is ever approximating to its edge, and hinting with subtle art how thoroughly he is familiar with, and how interesting he could make, the interdicted region on the other side. He never violates a single conventional rule; but at the same time the shadow of the immorality that is not seen is scarcely ever wanting to his delineation of the society that is seen. Every one may perceive what is passing in his fancy. Mr. Dickens is chargeable with no such defect: he does not seem to feel the temptation. By what we may fairly call an instinctive purity of genius, he not only observes the conventional rules, but makes excursions into topics which no other novelist could safely handle, and, by a felicitous instinct, deprives them of all impropriety. No other

[1] "School for Scandal." [2] *Life of Sheridan*, Vol. I, Chapter V.
[3] In *Martin Chuzzlewit.*

writer could have managed the humour of Mrs. Gamp without becoming unendurable. At the same time it is difficult not to believe that this singular insensibility to the temptations to which many of the greatest novelists have succumbed is in some measure connected with his utter inaptitude for delineating the portion of life to which their art is specially inclined. He delineates neither the love-affairs which ought to be, nor those which ought not to be.

Mr. Dickens's indisposition to "make capital" out of the most commonly tempting part of human sentiment is the more remarkable because he certainly does not show the same indisposition in other cases. He has naturally great powers of pathos; his imagination is familiar with the common sort of human suffering; and his marvellous conversancy with the detail of existence enables him to describe sick-beds and death-beds with an excellence very rarely seen in literature. A nature far more sympathetic than that of most authors has familiarized him with such subjects. In general, a certain apathy is characteristic of book-writers, and dulls the efficacy of their pathos. Mr. Dickens is quite exempt from this defect; but, on the other hand, is exceedingly prone to a very ostentatious exhibition of the opposite excellence. He dwells on dismal scenes with a kind of fawning fondness; and he seems unwilling to leave them, long after his readers have had more than enough of them. He describes Mr. Dennis the hangman [1] as having a professional fondness for his occupation: he has the same sort of fondness apparently for the profession of death-painter. The painful details he accumulates are a very serious drawback from the agreeableness of his writings. Dismal "light literature" is the dismalest of reading. The reality of the police reports is sufficiently bad, but a fictitious police report would be the most disagreeable of conceivable compositions. Some portions of Mr. Dickens's books are liable to a good many of the same objections. They are squalid from noisome trivialities, and horrid with terrifying crime. In his earlier books this is commonly relieved at frequent intervals by a graphic and original mirth. As, we will not say age, but maturity, has passed over his powers, this counteractive element has been lessened; the humour is not so happy as it was, but the wonderful fertility in painful *minutiæ* still remains.

Mr. Dickens's political opinions have subjected him to a good deal of criticism, and to some ridicule. He has shown, on many

[1] In *Barnaby Rudge.*

occasions, the desire — which we see so frequent among able and influential men — to start as a political reformer. Mr. Spurgeon said, with an application to himself: "If you've got the ear of the public, *of course* you must begin to tell it its faults." Mr. Dickens has been quite disposed to make this use of his popular influence. Even in *Pickwick* there are many traces of this tendency; and the way in which it shows itself in that book and in others is very characteristic of the time at which they appeared. The most instructive political characteristic of the years 1825 to 1845 is the growth and influence of the scheme of opinion which we call Radicalism. There are several species of creeds which are comprehended under this generic name, but they all evince a marked reaction against the worship of the English constitution and the affection for the English *status quo*, which were then the established creed and sentiment. All Radicals are Anti-Eldonites. This is equally true of the Benthamite or philosophical radicalism of the early period, and the Manchester, or "definite-grievance radicalism," among the last vestiges of which we are now living. Mr. Dickens represents a species different from either. His is what we may call the "sentimental radicalism"; and if we recur to the history of the time, we shall find that there would not originally have been any opprobrium attaching to such a name. The whole course of the legislation, and still more of the administration, of the first twenty years of the nineteenth century was marked by a harsh unfeelingness which is of all faults the most contrary to any with which we are chargeable now. The world of the "Six Acts," [1] of the frequent executions, of the Draconic criminal law, is so far removed from us that we cannot comprehend its having ever existed. It is more easy to understand the recoil which has followed. All the social speculation, and much of the social action of the few years succeeding the Reform Bill, bear the most marked traces of the reaction. The spirit which animates Mr. Dickens's political reasonings and observations expresses it exactly. The vice of the then existing social authorities, and of the then existing public, had been the forgetfulness of the pain which their own acts evidently produced, — an unrealizing habit which adhered to official rules and established maxims, and which would not be shocked by the evident consequences, by proximate human suffering.

[1] Of 23d November, 3d December, and 17th December, 1819; introduced by Eldon, Sidmouth, and Castlereagh, to put down sedition, just after the Manchester massacre and the Cato Street conspiracy. (Forrest Morgan.)

The sure result of this habit was the excitement of the habit precisely opposed to it. Mr. Carlyle, in his *Chartism*, we think, observes of the poor-law reform: "It was then, above all things, necessary that outdoor relief should cease. But how? What means did great Nature take for accomplishing that most desirable end? She created a race of men who believed the cessation of outdoor relief to be the one thing needful." In the same way, and by the same propensity to exaggerated opposition which is inherent in human nature, the unfeeling obtuseness of the early part of this century was to be corrected by an extreme, perhaps an excessive, sensibility to human suffering in the years which have followed. There was most adequate reason for the sentiment in its origin, and it had a great task to perform in ameliorating harsh customs and repealing dreadful penalties; but it has continued to repine at such evils long after they ceased to exist, and when the only facts that at all resemble them are the necessary painfulness of due punishment and the necessary rigidity of established law. Mr. Dickens is an example both of the proper use and of the abuse of the sentiment. His earlier works have many excellent descriptions of the abuses which had descended to the present generation from others whose sympathy with pain was less tender. Nothing can be better than the description of the poor debtors' gaol in *Pickwick*, or of the old parochial authorities in *Oliver Twist*. No doubt these descriptions are caricatures, all his delineations are so; but the beneficial use of such art can hardly be better exemplified. Human nature endures the aggravation of vices and foibles in written description better than that of excellences. We cannot bear to hear even the hero of a book forever called "just"; we detest the recurring praise even of beauty, much more of virtue. The moment you begin to exaggerate a character of true excellence, you spoil it; the traits are too delicate not to be injured by heightening, or marred by overemphasis. But a beadle is made for caricature. The slight measure of pomposity that humanizes his unfeelingness introduces the requisite comic element; even the turnkeys of a debtors' prison may by skilful hands be similarly used. The contrast between the destitute condition of Job Trotter and Mr. Jingle and their former swindling triumph is made comic by a rarer touch of unconscious art. Mr. Pickwick's warm heart takes so eager an interest in the misery of his old enemies, that our colder nature is tempted to smile. We endure the over-intensity, at any rate the unnecessary aggravation, of the surrounding misery;

and we endure it willingly, because it brings out better than anything else could have done the half-comic intensity of a sympathetic nature.

It is painful to pass from these happy instances of well-used power to the glaring abuses of the same faculty in Mr. Dickens's later books. He began by describing really removable evils in a style which would induce all persons, however insensible, to remove them if they could; he has ended by describing the natural evils and inevitable pains of the present state of being, in such a manner as must tend to excite discontent and repining. The result is aggravated, because Mr. Dickens never ceases to hint that these evils are removable, though he does not say by what means. Nothing is easier than to show the evils of anything. Mr. Dickens has not unfrequently spoken, and, what is worse, he has taught a great number of parrot-like imitators to speak, in what really is, if they knew it, a tone of objection to the necessary constitution of human society. If you will only write a description of it, any form of government will seem ridiculous. What is more absurd than a despotism, even at its best? A king of ability or an able minister sits in an orderly room filled with memorials, and returns, and documents, and memoranda. These are his world; among these he of necessity lives and moves. Yet how little of the real life of the nation he governs can be represented in an official form! How much of real suffering is there that statistics can never tell! how much of obvious good is there that no memorandum to a minister will ever mention! how much deception is there in what such documents contain! how monstrous must be the ignorance of the closet statesman, after all his life of labour, of much that a ploughman could tell him of! A free government is almost worse, as it must read in a written delineation. Instead of the real attention of a laborious and anxious statesman, we have now the shifting caprices of a popular assembly — elected for one object, deciding on another; changing with the turn of debate; shifting in its very composition; one set of men coming down to vote to-day, to-morrow another and often unlike set, most of them eager for the dinner-hour, actuated by unseen influences, by a respect for their constituents, by the dread of an attorney in a far-off borough. What people are these to control a nation's destinies, and wield the power of an empire, and regulate the happiness of millions! Either way we are at fault. Free government seems an absurdity, and despotism is so too. Again, every form of law has a distinct

expression, a rigid procedure, customary rules and forms. It is administered by human beings liable to mistake, confusion, and forgetfulness, and in the long run, and on the average, is sure to be tainted with vice and fraud. Nothing can be easier than to make a case, as we may say, against any particular system, by pointing out with emphatic caricature its inevitable miscarriages, and by pointing out nothing else. Those who so address us may assume a tone of philanthropy, and forever exult that they are not so unfeeling as other men are; but the real tendency of their exhortations is to make men dissatisfied with their inevitable condition, and, what is worse, to make them fancy that its irremediable evils can be remedied, and indulge in a succession of vague strivings and restless changes. Such, however — though in a style of expression somewhat different — is very much the tone with which Mr. Dickens and his followers have in later years made us familiar. To the second-hand repeaters of a cry so feeble, we can have nothing to say; if silly people cry because they think the world is silly, let them cry; but the founder of the school cannot, we are persuaded, peruse without mirth the lachrymose eloquence which his disciples have perpetrated. The soft moisture of irrelevant sentiment cannot have entirely entered into his soul. A truthful genius must have forbidden it. Let us hope that his pernicious example may incite some one of equal genius to preach with equal efficiency a sterner and a wiser gospel; but there is no need just now for us to preach it without genius.

There has been much controversy about Mr. Dickens's taste. A great many cultivated people will scarcely concede that he has any taste at all; a still larger number of fervent admirers point, on the other hand, to a hundred felicitous descriptions and delineations which abound in apt expressions and skilful turns and happy images, — in which it would be impossible to alter a single word without altering for the worse; and naturally inquire whether such excellences in what is written do not indicate good taste in the writer. The truth is, that Mr. Dickens has what we may call creative taste; that is to say, the habit or faculty, whichever we may choose to call it, which at the critical instant of artistic production offers to the mind the right word, and the right word only. If he is engaged on a good subject for caricature, there will be no defect of taste to preclude the caricature from being excellent. But it is only in moments of imaginative production that he has any taste at all. His works nowhere indicate that he possesses

in any degree the passive taste which decides what is good in the writings of other people, and what is not, and which performs the same critical duty upon a writer's own efforts when the confusing mists of productive imagination have passed away. Nor has Mr. Dickens the gentlemanly instinct which in many minds supplies the place of purely critical discernment, and which, by constant association with those who know what is best, acquires a second-hand perception of that which is best. He has no tendency to conventionalism for good or for evil; his merits are far removed from the ordinary path of writers, and it was not probably so much effort to him as to other men to step so far out of that path: he scarcely knew how far it was. For the same reason, he cannot tell how faulty his writing will often be thought, for he cannot tell what people will think.

A few pedantic critics have regretted that Mr. Dickens had not received what they call a regular education. And if we understand their meaning, we believe they mean to regret that he had not received a course of discipline which would probably have impaired his powers. A regular education should mean that ordinary system of regulation and instruction which experience has shown to fit men best for the ordinary pursuits of life. It applies the requisite discipline to each faculty in the exact proportion in which that faculty is wanted in the pursuits of life; it develops understanding, and memory, and imagination, each in accordance with the scale prescribed. To men of ordinary faculties this is nearly essential; it is the only mode in which they can be fitted for the inevitable competition of existence. To men of regular and symmetrical genius also, such a training will often be beneficial. The world knows pretty well what are the great tasks of the human mind, and has learned in the course of ages with some accuracy what is the kind of culture likely to promote their exact performance. A man of abilities extraordinary in degree but harmonious in proportion will be the better for having submitted to the kind of discipline which has been ascertained to fit a man for the work to which powers in that proportion are best fitted; he will do what he has to do better and more gracefully; culture will add a touch to the finish of nature. But the case is very different with men of irregular and anomalous genius, whose excellences consist in the aggravation of some special faculty, or at the most one or two. The discipline which will fit such a man for the production of great literary works is that which will most develop the peculiar powers

in which he excels; the rest of the mind will be far less important; it will not be likely that the culture which is adapted to promote this special development will also be that which is most fitted for expanding the powers of common men in common directions. The precise problem is to develop the powers of a strange man in a strange direction. In the case of Mr. Dickens, it would have been absurd to have shut up his observant youth within the walls of a college. They would have taught him nothing about Mrs. Gamp there; Sam Weller took no degree. The kind of early life fitted to develop the power of apprehensive observation is a brooding life in stirring scenes; the idler in the streets of life knows the streets; the bystander knows the picturesque effect of life better than the player; and the meditative idler amid the hum of existence is much more likely to know its sound and to take in and comprehend its depths and meanings than the scholastic student intent on books, which, if they represent any world, represent one which has long passed away, — which commonly try rather to develop the reasoning understanding than the seeing observation, — which are written in languages that have long been dead. You will not train by such discipline a caricaturist of obvious manners.

Perhaps, too, a regular instruction and daily experience of the searching ridicule of critical associates would have detracted from the pluck which Mr. Dickens shows in all his writings. It requires a great deal of courage to be a humorous writer; you are always afraid that people will laugh at you instead of with you: undoubtedly there is a certain eccentricity about it. You take up the esteemed writers, Thucydides and the *Saturday Review;* after all, they do not make you laugh. It is not the function of really artistic productions to contribute to the mirth of human beings. All sensible men are afraid of it, and it is only with an extreme effort that a printed joke attains to the perusal of the public: the chances are many to one that the anxious producer loses heart in the correction of the press, and that the world never laughs at all. Mr. Dickens is quite exempt from this weakness. He has what a Frenchman might call the courage of his faculty. The real daring which is shown in the *Pickwick Papers*, in the whole character of Mr. Weller senior, as well as in that of his son, is immense, far surpassing any which has been shown by any other contemporary writer. The brooding irregular mind is in its first stage prone to this sort of courage. It perhaps knows that its

ideas are "out of the way"; but with the infantine simplicity of youth, it supposes that originality is an advantage. Persons more familiar with the ridicule of their equals in station (and this is to most men the great instructress of the college time) well know that of all qualities this one most requires to be clipped and pared and measured. Posterity, we doubt not, will be entirely perfect in every conceivable element of judgment; but the existing generation like what they have heard before — it is much easier. It required great courage in Mr. Dickens to write what his genius has compelled them to appreciate.

We have throughout spoken of Mr. Dickens as he was, rather than as he is; or, to use a less discourteous phrase, and we hope a truer, of his early works rather than of those which are more recent. We could not do otherwise consistently with the true code of criticism. A man of great genius, who has written great and enduring works, must be judged mainly by them; and not by the inferior productions which, from the necessities of personal position, a fatal facility of composition, or other cause, he may pour forth at moments less favourable to his powers. Those who are called on to review these inferior productions themselves, must speak of them in the terms they may deserve; but those who have the more pleasant task of estimating as a whole the genius of the writer, may confine their attention almost wholly to those happier efforts which illustrate that genius. We should not like to have to speak in detail of Mr. Dickens's later works, and we have not done so. There are, indeed, peculiar reasons why a genius constituted as his is (at least if we are correct in the view which we have taken of it) would not endure without injury during a long life the applause of the many, the temptations of composition, and the general excitement of existence. Even in his earlier works it was impossible not to fancy that there was a weakness of fibre unfavourable to the longevity of excellence. This was the effect of his deficiency in those masculine faculties of which we have said so much, — the reasoning understanding and firm far-seeing sagacity. It is these two component elements which stiffen the mind, and give a consistency to the creed and a coherence to its effects, — which enable it to protect itself from the rush of circumstances. If to a deficiency in these we add an extreme sensibility to circumstances, — a mobility, as Lord Byron used to call it, of emotion, which is easily impressed, and still more easily carried away by impression, — we have the idea of a character peculiarly unfitted to bear the flux

of time and chance. A man of very great determination could hardly bear up against them with such slight aids from within and with such peculiar sensibility to temptation. A man of merely ordinary determination would succumb to it; and Mr. Dickens has succumbed. His position was certainly unfavourable. He has told us that the works of his later years, inferior as all good critics have deemed them, have yet been more read than those of his earlier and healthier years. The most characteristic part of his audience, the lower middle-class, were ready to receive with delight the least favourable productions of genius. Human nature cannot endure this; it is too much to have to endure a coincident temptation both from within and from without. Mr. Dickens was too much inclined by natural disposition to lachrymose eloquence and exaggerated caricature. Such was the kind of writing which he wrote most easily. He found likewise that such was the kind of writing that was read most readily; and of course he wrote that kind. Who would have done otherwise? No critic is entitled to speak very harshly of such degeneracy, if he is not sure that he could have coped with difficulties so peculiar. If that rule is to be observed, who is there that will not be silent? No other Englishman has attained such a hold on the vast populace; it is little, therefore, to say that no other has surmounted its attendant temptations.

VI

WALTER PATER

(1839–1894)

WORDSWORTH

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Some English critics at the beginning of the present century had a great deal to say concerning a distinction, of much importance, as they thought, in the true estimate of poetry, between the *Fancy*, and another more powerful faculty — the *Imagination*. This metaphysical distinction, borrowed originally from the writings of German philosophers, and perhaps not always clearly apprehended by those who talked of it, involved a far deeper and more vital distinction, with which indeed all true criticism more or less directly has to do, the distinction, namely, between higher and lower degrees of intensity in the poet's perception of his subject, and in his concentration of himself upon his work. Of those who dwelt upon the metaphysical distinction between the Fancy and the Imagination, it was Wordsworth who made the most of it, assuming it as the basis for the final classification of his poetical writings; and it is in these writings that the deeper and more vital distinction, which, as I have said, underlies the metaphysical distinction, is most needed, and may best be illustrated.

For nowhere is there so perplexed a mixture as in Wordsworth's own poetry, of work touched with intense and individual power, with work of almost no character at all. He has much conventional sentiment, and some of that insincere poetic diction, against which his most serious critical efforts were directed: the reaction in his political ideas, consequent on the excesses of 1795, makes him, at times, a mere declaimer on moral and social topics; and he seems, sometimes, to force an unwilling pen, and write by rule. By making the most of these blemishes it is possible to obscure the

true æsthetic value of his work, just as his life also, a life of much quiet delicacy and independence, might easily be placed in a false focus, and made to appear a somewhat tame theme in illustration of the more obvious parochial virtues. And those who wish to understand his influence, and experience his peculiar savour, must bear with patience the presence of an alien element in Wordsworth's work, which never coalesced with what is really delightful in it, nor underwent his special power. Who that values his writings most has not felt the intrusion there, from time to time, of something tedious and prosaic? Of all poets equally great, he would gain most by a skilfully made anthology. Such a selection would show, in truth, not so much what he was, or to himself or others seemed to be, as what, by the more energetic and fertile quality in his writings, he was ever tending to become. And the mixture in his work, as it actually stands, is so perplexed, that one fears to miss the least promising composition even, lest some precious morsel should be lying hidden within — the few perfect lines, the phrase, the single word perhaps, to which he often works up mechanically through a poem, almost the whole of which may be tame enough. He who thought that in all creative work the larger part was *given* passively, to the recipient mind, who waited so dutifully upon the gift, to whom so large a measure was sometimes given, had his times also of desertion and relapse; and he has permitted the impress of these too to remain in his work. And this duality there — the fitfulness with which the higher qualities manifest themselves in it, gives the effect in his poetry of a power not altogether his own, or under his control, which comes and goes when it will, lifting or lowering a matter, poor in itself; so that that old fancy which made the poet's art an enthusiasm, a form of divine possession, seems almost literally true of him.

This constant suggestion of an absolute duality between higher and lower moods, and the work done in them, stimulating one always to look below the surface, makes the reading of Wordsworth an excellent sort of training towards the things of art and poetry. It begets in those, who, coming across him in youth, can bear him at all, a habit of reading between the lines, a faith in the effect of concentration and collectedness of mind in the right appreciation of poetry, an expectation of things, in this order, coming to one by means of a right discipline of the temper as well as of the intellect. He meets us with the promise that he has much, and something very peculiar, to give us, if we will follow a certain difficult way,

and seems to have the secret of a special and privileged state of mind. And those who have undergone his influence, and followed this difficul: way, are like people who have passed through some initiation, a *disciplina arcani*,[1] by submitting to which they become able constantly to distinguish in art, speech, feeling, manners, that which is organic, animated, expressive, from that which is only conventional, derivative, inexpressive.

But although the necessity of selecting these precious morsels for one's self is an opportunity for the exercise of Wordsworth's peculiar influence, and induces a kind of just criticism and true estimate of it, yet the purely literary product would have been more excellent, had the writer himself purged away that alien element. How perfect would have been the little treasury, shut between the covers of how thin a book! Let us suppose the desired separation made, the electric thread untwined, the golden pieces, great and small, lying apart together.[2] What are the peculiarities of this residue? What special sense does Wordsworth exercise, and what instincts does he satisfy? What are the subjects and the motives which in him excite the imaginative faculty? What are the qualities in things and persons which he values, the impression and sense of which he can convey to others, in an extraordinary way?

An intimate consciousness of the expression of natural things, which weighs, listens, penetrates, where the earlier mind passed roughly by, is a large element in the complexion of modern poetry. It has been remarked as a fact in mental history again and again. It reveals itself in many forms; but is strongest and most attractive in what is strongest and most attractive in modern literature. It is exemplified, almost equally, by writers as unlike each other as Senancour and Théophile Gautier: as a singular chapter in the history of the human mind, its growth might be traced from Rousseau to Chateaubriand, from Chateaubriand to Victor Hugo: it has doubtless some latent connection with those pantheistic theories which locate an intelligent soul in material things, and have largely exercised men's minds in some modern systems of philosophy: it is traceable even in the graver writings of historians: it makes as much difference between ancient and modern landscape art,

[1] [A training in solving mystery.]

[2] Since this essay was written, such selections have been made, with excellent taste, by Matthew Arnold and Professor Knight.

as there is between the rough masks of an early mosaic and a portrait by Reynolds or Gainsborough. Of this new sense, the writings of Wordsworth are the central and elementary expression: he is more simply and entirely occupied with it than any other poet, though there are fine expressions of precisely the same thing in so different a poet as Shelley. There was in his own character a certain contentment, a sort of inborn religious placidity, seldom found united with a sensibility so mobile as his, which was favourable to the quiet, habitual observation of inanimate, or imperfectly animate, existence. His life of eighty years is divided by no very profoundly felt incidents: its changes are almost wholly inward, and it falls into broad, untroubled, perhaps somewhat monotonous spaces. What it most resembles is the life of one of those early Italian or Flemish painters, who, just because their minds were full of heavenly visions, passed, some of them, the better part of sixty years in quiet, systematic industry. This placid life matured a quite unusual sensibility, really innate in him, to the sights and sounds of the natural world — the flower and its shadow on the stone, the cuckoo and its echo. The poem of *Resolution and Independence* is a storehouse of such records: for its fulness of imagery it may be compared to Keats's *Saint Agnes' Eve*. To read one of his longer pastoral poems for the first time, is like a day spent in a new country: the memory is crowded for a while with its precise and vivid incidents: —

> "The pliant harebell swinging in the breeze
> On some grey rock"; —
>
> "The single sheep and the one blasted tree
> And the bleak music from that old stone wall";
>
> "And in the meadows and the lower grounds
> Was all the sweetness of a common dawn"; —
>
> "And that green corn all day is rustling in thine ears."

Clear and delicate at once, as he is in the outlining of visible imagery, he is more clear and delicate still, and finely scrupulous, in the noting of sounds; so that he conceives of noble sound as even moulding the human countenance to nobler types, and as something actually "profaned" by colour, by visible form, or image. He has a power likewise of realizing, and conveying to the consciousness of the reader, abstract and elementary impressions — silence, darkness, absolute motionlessness: or, again, the whole complex sen-

timent of a particular place, the abstract expression of desolation in the long white road, of peacefulness in a particular folding of the hills. In the airy building of the brain, a special day or hour even, comes to have for him a sort of personal identity, a spirit or angel given to it, by which, for its exceptional insight, or the happy light upon it, it has a presence in one's history, and acts there, as a separate power or accomplishment; and he has celebrated in many of his poems the "efficacious spirit," which, as he says, resides in these "particular spots" of time.

It is to such a world, and to a world of congruous meditation thereon, that we see him retiring in his but lately published poem of *The Recluse* — taking leave, without much count of costs, of the world of business, of action and ambition, as also of all that for the majority of mankind counts as sensuous enjoyment.[1]

[1] In Wordsworth's prefatory advertisement to the first edition of *The Prelude*, published in 1850, it is stated that the work was intended to be introductory to *The Recluse;* and that *The Recluse*, if completed, would have consisted of three parts. The second part is *The Excursion.* The third part was only planned; but the first book of the first part was left in manuscript by Wordsworth — though in manuscript, it is said, in no great condition of forwardness for the printers. This book, now for the first time printed *in extenso* (a very noble passage from it found place in that prose advertisement to *The Excursion*), is included in the latest edition of Wordsworth by Mr. John Morley. It was well worth adding to the poet's great bequest to English literature. A true student of his work, who has formulated for himself what he supposes to be the leading characteristics of Wordsworth's genius, will feel, we think, lively interest in testing them by the various fine passages in what is here presented for the first time. Let the following serve for a sample: —

> Thickets full of songsters, and the voice
> Of lordly birds, an unexpected sound
> Heard now and then from morn to latest eve,
> Admonishing the man who walks below
> Of solitude and silence in the sky: —
> These have we, and a thousand nooks of earth
> Have also these, but nowhere else is found,
> Nowhere (or is it fancy?) can be found
> The one sensation that is here; 'tis here,
> Here as it found its way into my heart
> In childhood, here as it abides by day,
> By night, here only; or in chosen minds
> That take it with them hence, where'er they go.
> — 'Tis, but I cannot name it, 'tis the sense
> Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
> A blended holiness of earth and sky,
> Something that makes this individual spot
> This small abiding-place of many men,
> A termination, and a last retreat,
> A centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,
> A whole without dependence or defect,
> Made for itself, and happy in itself,
> Perfect contentment, Unity entire.

And so it came about that this sense of a life in natural objects, which in most poetry is but a rhetorical artifice, is with Wordsworth the assertion of what for him is almost literal fact. To him every natural object seemed to possess more or less of a moral or spiritual life, to be capable of a companionship with man, full of expression, of inexplicable affinities and delicacies of intercourse. An emanation, a particular spirit, belonged, not to the moving leaves or water only, but to the distant peak of the hills arising suddenly, by some change of perspective, above the nearer horizon, to the passing space of light across the plain, to the lichened Druidic stone even, for a certain weird fellowship in it with the moods of men. It was like a "survival," in the peculiar intellectual temperament of a man of letters at the end of the eighteenth century, of that primitive condition, which some philosophers have traced in the general history of human culture, wherein all outward objects alike, including even the works of men's hands, were believed to be endowed with animation, and the world was "full of souls" — that mood in which the old Greek gods were first begotten, and which had many strange aftergrowths.

In the early ages, this belief, delightful as its effects on poetry often are, was but the result of a crude intelligence. But, in Wordsworth, such power of seeing life, such perception of a soul, in inanimate things, came of an exceptional susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear, and was, in its essence, a kind of sensuousness. At least, it is only in a temperament exceptionally susceptible on the sensuous side, that this sense of the expressiveness of outward things comes to be so large a part of life. That he awakened "a sort of thought in sense," is Shelley's just estimate of this element in Wordsworth's poetry.

And it was through nature, thus ennobled by a semblance of passion and thought, that he approached the spectacle of human life. Human life, indeed, is for him, at first, only an additional, accidental grace on an expressive landscape. When he thought of man, it was of man as in the presence and under the influence of these effective natural objects, and linked to them by many associations. The close connection of man with natural objects, the habitual association of his thoughts and feelings with a particular spot of earth, has sometimes seemed to degrade those who are subject to its influence, as if it did but reënforce that physical connection of our nature with the actual lime and clay of the soil, which is always drawing us nearer to our end. But for Wordsworth, these

influences tended to the dignity of human nature, because they tended to tranquillize it. By raising nature to the level of human thought he gives it power and expression: he subdues man to the level of nature, and gives him thereby a certain breadth and coolness and solemnity. The leech-gatherer on the moor, the woman "stepping westward," are for him natural objects, almost in the same sense as the aged thorn, or the lichened rock on the heath. In this sense the leader of the "Lake School," in spite of an earnest preoccupation with man, his thoughts, his destiny, is the poet of nature. And of nature, after all, in its modesty. The English lake country has, of course, its grandeurs. But the peculiar function of Wordsworth's genius, as carrying in it a power to open out the soul of apparently little or familiar things, would have found its true test had he become the poet of Surrey, say! and the prophet of its life. The glories of Italy and Switzerland, though he did write a little about them, had too potent a material life of their own to serve greatly his poetic purpose.

Religious sentiment, consecrating the affections and natural regrets of the human heart, above all, that pitiful awe and care for the perishing human clay, of which relic-worship is but the corruption, has always had much to do with localities, with the thoughts which attach themselves to actual scenes and places. Now what is true of it everywhere, is truest of it in those secluded valleys where one generation after another maintains the same abiding-place; and it was on this side, that Wordsworth apprehended religion most strongly. Consisting, as it did so much, in the recognition of local sanctities, in the habit of connecting the stones and trees of a particular spot of earth with the great events of life, till the low walls, the green mounds, the half-obliterated epitaphs seemed full of voices, and a sort of natural oracles, the very religion of these people of the dales appeared but as another link between them and the earth, and was literally a religion of nature. It tranquillized them by bringing them under the placid rule of traditional and narrowly localized observances. "Grave livers," they seemed to him, under this aspect, with stately speech, and something of that natural dignity of manners, which underlies the highest courtesy.

And, seeing man thus as a part of nature, elevated and solemnized in proportion as his daily life and occupations brought him into companionship with permanent natural objects, his very religion forming new links for him with the narrow limits of the

valley, the low vaults of his church, the rough stones of his home, made intense for him now with profound sentiment, Wordsworth was able to appreciate passion in the lowly. He chooses to depict people from humble life, because, being nearer to nature than others, they are on the whole more impassioned, certainly more direct in their expression of passion, than other men: it is for this direct expression of passion, that he values their humble words. In much that he said in exaltation of rural life, he was but pleading indirectly for that sincerity, that perfect fidelity to one's own inward presentations, to the precise features of the picture within, without which any profound poetry is impossible. It was not for their tameness, but for this passionate sincerity, that he chose incidents and situations from common life, "related in a selection of language really used by men." He constantly endeavours to bring his language near to the real language of men: to the real language of men, however, not on the dead level of their ordinary intercourse, but in select moments of vivid sensation, when this language is winnowed and ennobled by excitement. There are poets who have chosen rural life as their subject, for the sake of its passionless repose, and times when Wordsworth himself extols the mere calm and dispassionate survey of things as the highest aim of poetical culture. But it was not for such passionless calm that he preferred the scenes of pastoral life; and the meditative poet, sheltering himself, as it might seem, from the agitations of the outward world, is in reality only clearing the scene for the great exhibitions of emotion, and what he values most is the almost elementary expression of elementary feelings.

And so he has much for those who value highly the concentrated presentment of passion, who appraise men and women by their susceptibility to it, and art and poetry as they afford the spectacle of it. Breaking from time to time into the pensive spectacle of their daily toil, their occupations near to nature, come those great elementary feelings, lifting and solemnizing their language and giving it a natural music. The great, distinguishing passion came to Michael by the sheepfold, to Ruth by the wayside, adding these humble children of the furrow to the true aristocracy of passionate souls. In this respect, Wordsworth's work resembles most that of George Sand, in those of her novels which depict country life. With a penetrative pathos, which puts him in the same rank with the masters of the sentiment of pity in literature, with Meinhold and Victor Hugo, he collects all the traces of vivid excitement

which were to be found in that pastoral world — the girl who rung her father's knell; the unborn infant feeling about its mother's heart; the instinctive touches of children; the sorrows of the wild creatures, even — their homesickness, their strange yearnings; the tales of passionate regret that hang by a ruined farm-building, a heap of stones, a deserted sheepfold; that gay, false, adventurous, outer world, which breaks in from time to time to bewilder and deflower these quiet homes; not "passionate sorrow" only, for the overthrow of the soul's beauty, but the loss of, or carelessness for personal beauty even, in those whom men have wronged — their pathetic wanness; the sailor "who, in his heart, was half a shepherd on the stormy seas"; the wild woman teaching her child to pray for her betrayer; incidents like the making of the shepherd's staff, or that of the young boy laying the first stone of the sheepfold; — all the pathetic episodes of their humble existence, their longing, their wonder at fortune, their poor pathetic pleasures, like the pleasures of children, won so hardly in the struggle for bare existence; their yearning towards each other, in their darkened houses, or at their early toil. A sort of biblical depth and solemnity hangs over this strange, new, passionate, pastoral world, of which he first raised the image, and the reflection of which some of our best modern fiction has caught from him.

He pondered much over the philosophy of his poetry, and reading deeply in the history of his own mind, seems at times to have passed the borders of a world of strange speculations, inconsistent enough, had he cared to note such inconsistencies, with those traditional beliefs, which were otherwise the object of his devout acceptance. Thinking of the high value he set upon customariness, upon all that is habitual, local, rooted in the ground, in matters of religious sentiment, you might sometimes regard him as one tethered down to a world, refined and peaceful indeed, but with no broad outlook, a world protected, but somewhat narrowed, by the influence of received ideas. But he is at times also something very different from this, and something much bolder. A chance expression is overheard and placed in a new connection, the sudden memory of a thing long past occurs to him, a distant object is relieved for a while by a random gleam of light — accidents turning up for a moment what lies below the surface of our immediate experience — and he passes from the humble graves and lowly arches of "the little rock-like pile" of a Westmoreland church,

on bold trains of speculative thought, and comes, from point to point, into strange contact with thoughts which have visited, from time to time, far more venturesome, perhaps errant, spirits.

He had pondered deeply, for instance, on those strange reminiscences and forebodings, which seem to make our lives stretch before and behind us, beyond where we can see or touch anything, or trace the lines of connection. Following the soul, backwards and forwards, on these endless ways, his sense of man's dim, potential powers became a pledge to him, indeed, of a future life, but carried him back also to that mysterious notion of an earlier state of existence — the fancy of the Platonists — the old heresy of Origen. It was in this mood that he conceived those oft-reiterated regrets for a half-ideal childhood, when the relics of Paradise still clung about the soul — a childhood, as it seemed, full of the fruits of old age, lost for all, in a degree, in the passing away of the youth of the world, lost for each one, over again, in the passing away of actual youth. It is this ideal childhood which he celebrates in his famous *Ode on the Recollections of Childhood*, and some other poems which may be grouped around it, such as the lines on *Tintern Abbey*, and something like what he describes was actually truer of himself than he seems to have understood; for his own most delightful poems were really the instinctive productions of earlier life, and most surely for him, "the first diviner influence of this world" passed away, more and more completely, in his contact with experience.

Sometimes as he dwelt upon those moments of profound, imaginative power, in which the outward object appears to take colour and expression, a new nature almost, from the prompting of the observant mind, the actual world would, as it were, dissolve and detach itself, flake by flake, and he himself seemed to be the creator, and when he would the destroyer, of the world in which he lived — that old isolating thought of many a brain-sick mystic of ancient and modern times.

At other times, again, in those periods of intense susceptibility, in which he appeared to himself as but the passive recipient of external influences, he was attracted by the thought of a spirit of life in outward things, a single, all-pervading mind in them, of which man, and even the poet's imaginative energy, are but moments — that old dream of the *anima mundi*, the mother of all things and their grave, in which some had desired to lose themselves, and others had become indifferent to the distinctions of good and evil.

It would come, sometimes, like the sign of the *macrocosm* to Faust in his cell: the network of man and nature was seen to be pervaded by a common, universal life: a new, bold thought lifted him above the furrow, above the green turf of the Westmoreland churchyard, to a world altogether different in its vagueness and vastness, and the narrow glen was full of the brooding power of one universal spirit.

And so he has something, also, for those who feel the fascination of bold speculative ideas, who are really capable of rising upon them to conditions of poetical thought. He uses them, indeed, always with a very fine apprehension of the limits within which alone philosophical imaginings have any place in true poetry; and using them only for poetical purposes, is not too careful even to make them consistent with each other. To him, theories which for other men bring a world of technical diction, brought perfect form and expression, as in those two lofty books of the *Prelude*, which describe the decay and the restoration of Imagination and Taste. Skirting the borders of this world of bewildering heights and depths, he got but the first exciting influence of it, that joyful enthusiasm which great imaginative theories prompt, when the mind first comes to have an understanding of them; and it is not under the influence of these thoughts that his poetry becomes tedious or loses its blitheness. He keeps them, too, always within certain ethical bounds, so that no word of his could offend the simplest of those simple souls which are always the largest portion of mankind. But it is, nevertheless, the contact of these thoughts, the speculative boldness in them, which constitutes, at least for some minds, the secret attraction of much of his best poetry — the sudden passage from lowly thoughts and places to the majestic forms of philosophical imagination, the play of these forms over a world so different, enlarging so strangely the bounds of its humble churchyards, and breaking such a wild light on the graves of christened children.

And these moods always brought with them faultless expression. In regard to expression, as with feeling and thought, the duality of the higher and lower moods was absolute. It belonged to the higher, the imaginative mood, and was the pledge of its reality, to bring the appropriate language with it. In him, when the really poetical motive worked at all, it united, with absolute justice, the word and the idea; each, in the imaginative flame, becoming in-

separably one with the other, by that fusion of matter and form, which is the characteristic of the highest poetical expression. His words are themselves thought and feeling; not eloquent, or musical words merely, but that sort of creative language which carries the reality of what it depicts, directly, to the consciousness.

The music of mere metre performs but a limited, yet a very peculiar and subtly ascertained function, in Wordsworth's poetry. With him, metre is but an additional grace, accessory to that deeper music of words and sounds, that moving power, which they exercise in the nobler prose no less than in formal poetry. It is a sedative to that excitement, an excitement sometimes almost painful, under which the language, alike of poetry and prose, attains a rhythmical power, independent of metrical combination, and dependent rather on some subtle adjustment of the elementary sounds of words themselves to the image or feeling they convey. Yet some of his pieces, pieces prompted by a sort of half-playful mysticism, like the *Daffodils* and *The Two April Mornings*, are distinguished by a certain quaint gayety of metre, and rival by their perfect execution, in this respect, similar pieces among our own Elizabethan, or contemporary French poetry. And those who take up these poems after an interval of months, or years perhaps, may be surprised at finding how well old favourites wear, how their strange, inventive turns of diction or thought still send through them the old feeling of surprise. Those who lived about Wordsworth were all great lovers of the older English literature, and oftentimes there came out in him a noticeable likeness to our earlier poets. He quotes unconsciously, but with new power of meaning, a clause from one of Shakespeare's sonnets; and, as with some other men's most famous work, the *Ode on the Recollections of Childhood* had its anticipator.[1] He drew something too from the unconscious mysticism of the old English language itself, drawing out the inward significance of its racy idiom, and the not wholly unconscious poetry of the language used by the simplest people under strong excitement — language, therefore, at its origin.

The office of the poet is not that of the moralist, and the first aim of Wordsworth's poetry is to give the reader a peculiar kind of pleasure. But through his poetry, and through this pleasure in it, he does actually convey to the reader an extraordinary wisdom in the things of practice. One lesson, if men must have lessons,

[1] Henry Vaughan, in *The Retreat*.

he conveys more clearly than all, the supreme importance of contemplation in the conduct of life.

Contemplation — impassioned contemplation — that is with Wordsworth the end-in-itself, the perfect end. We see the majority of mankind going most often to definite ends, lower or higher ends, as their own instincts may determine; but the end may never be attained, and the means not be quite the right means, great ends and little ones alike being, for the most part, distant, and the ways to them, in this dim world, somewhat vague. Meantime, to higher or lower ends, they move too often with something of a sad countenance, with hurried and ignoble gait, becoming, unconsciously, something like thorns, in their anxiety to bear grapes; it being possible for people, in the pursuit of even great ends, to become themselves thin and impoverished in spirit and temper, thus diminishing the sum of perfection in the world, at its very sources. We understand this when it is a question of mean, or of intensely selfish ends — of Grandet, or Javert. We think it bad morality to say that the end justifies the means, and we know how false to all higher conceptions of the religious life is the type of one who is ready to do evil that good may come. We contrast with such dark, mistaken eagerness, a type like that of Saint Catherine of Siena, who made the means to her ends so attractive, that she has won for herself an undying place in the *House Beautiful*, not by her rectitude of soul only, but by its "fairness" — by those quite different qualities which commend themselves to the poet and the artist.

Yet, for most of us, the conception of means and ends covers the whole of life, and is the exclusive type or figure under which we represent our lives to ourselves. Such a figure, reducing all things to machinery, though it has on its side the authority of that old Greek moralist who has fixed for succeeding generations the outline of the theory of right living, is too like a mere picture or description of men's lives as we actually find them, to be the basis of the higher ethics. It covers the meanness of men's daily lives, and much of the dexterity and the vigour with which they pursue what may seem to them the good of themselves or of others; but not the intangible perfection of those whose ideal is rather in *being* than in *doing* — not those *manners* which are, in the deepest as in the simplest sense, *morals*, and without which one cannot so much as offer a cup of water to a poor man without offence — not the part of "antique Rachel," sitting in the company of Beatrice;

and even the moralist might well endeavour rather to withdraw men from the too exclusive consideration of means and ends, in life.

Against this predominance of machinery in our existence, Wordsworth's poetry, like all great art and poetry, is a continual protest. Justify rather the end by the means, it seems to say: whatever may become of the fruit, make sure of the flowers and the leaves. It was justly said, therefore, by one who had meditated very profoundly on the true relation of means to ends in life, and on the distinction between what is desirable in itself and what is desirable only as machinery, that when the battle which he and his friends were waging had been won, the world would need more than ever those qualities which Wordsworth was keeping alive and nourishing.[1]

That the end of life is not action but contemplation — *being* as distinct from *doing* — a certain disposition of the mind: is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality. In poetry, in art, if you enter into their true spirit at all, you touch this principle, in a measure: these, by their very sterility, are a type of beholding for the mere joy of beholding. To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified: to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry. Wordsworth, and other poets who have been like him in ancient or more recent times, are the masters, the experts, in this art of impassioned contemplation. Their work is, not to teach lessons, or enforce rules, or even to stimulate us to noble ends; but to withdraw the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great facts in man's existence which no machinery affects, "on the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their occupations, and the entire world of nature," — on "the operations of the elements and the appearances of the visible universe, on storm and sunshine, on the revolutions of the seasons, on cold and heat, on loss of friends and kindred, on injuries and resentments, on gratitude and hope, on fear and sorrow." To witness this spectacle with appropriate emotions is the aim of all culture; and of these emotions poetry like Wordsworth's is a great nourisher and stimulant. He sees nature full of sentiment and excitement; he sees men and

[1] See an interesting paper by Mr. John Morley, on "The Death of Mr. Mill," *Fortnightly Review*, June, 1873.

women as parts of nature, passionate, excited, in strange grouping and connection with the grandeur and beauty of the natural world: — images, in his own words, "of man suffering, amid awful forms and powers."

Such is the figure of the more powerful and original poet, hidden away, in part, under those weaker elements in Wordsworth's poetry, which for some minds determine their entire character; a poet somewhat bolder and more passionate than might at first sight be supposed, but not too bold for true poetical taste; an unimpassioned writer, you might sometimes fancy, yet thinking the chief aim, in life and art alike, to be a certain deep emotion; seeking most often the great elementary passions in lowly places; having at least this condition of all impassioned work, that he aims always at an absolute sincerity of feeling and diction, so that he is the true forerunner of the deepest and most passionate poetry of our own day; yet going back also, with something of a protest against the conventional fervour of much of the poetry popular in his own time, to those older English poets, whose unconscious likeness often comes out in him.

VII

JOHN MACKINNON ROBERTSON

(1856)

POE

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I

Since all literary cases must be periodically rejudged, each generation's opinions on any phase of the past being part of its special relation to things, it is strictly as needless to justify the plea for a fresh trial in any one case as it is vain to deny it. Demurrers have been too often made to leave any difficulty about their rebuttal. Evolution is become a name potent to put down the most obstreperous conservative in criticism. It is involved in that law, however, that we shall all of us continue to have our particular leanings, and that some problems will peculiarly appeal to the general mind at given junctures. And while it is part of the here-ensuing argument that less than due hearing as well as less than justice has been granted in the case of Edgar Allan Poe, it is probably true that today even more than ever men feel the fascination of the general problem falling under his name.

Just because of its fascination, indeed, the Poe problem has been less methodically handled than most. Its aspects are so bizarre that critics have been more concerned to declare as much than to sum them up with scientific exactitude. First the ear of the world was won with a biography unparalleled in literature for its calculated calumny, a slander so comprehensive and so circumstantial

that to this day perhaps most people who have heard of Poe regard him as what he himself called "that *monstrum horrendum*,[1] an unprincipled man of genius," with almost no moral virtue and lacking almost no vice. It was an ex-clergyman, Griswold, who launched the legend; and another clergyman, Gilfillan, improved on it to the extent of suggesting that the poet broke his wife's heart so as to be able to write a poem about her. The average mind being, however, a little less ready than the clerical to believe and utter evil, there at length grew up a body of vindication which for instructed readers has displaced the sinister myth of the early records. Vindication, as it happened, began immediately on the publication of Griswold's memoir; only, the slander had the prestige of book form, and of the copyright edition of Poe's works, while the defence was at first confined to newspapers; hence an immense start for the former: but at length generous zeal triumphed to the extent of creating an almost stainless effigy of the poet — stainless save for the constitutional flaw which was confessed only to claim for it a human pity, and the faults of tone and temper which came of nervous malady and undue toil. Then there came a reaction, the facts were more closely studied and more unsympathetically pronounced upon; the unsleeping ill-will towards the poet's name in his own country still had the literary field and favour, and the last and most ambitious edition of his works is supervised by a none too friendly critic.[2] Good and temperate criticism has been forthcoming between whiles; but there is still room, one fancies, for an impartial re-statement of the facts.

"It would seem," writes Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman, the American poetess, sometime the *fiancée* of Poe, and one of the vindicators of his memory, "it would seem that the true point of view from which his genius should be regarded has yet to be sought."[3] The full force of that observation, perhaps, cannot be felt unless it be read in context with some of the sentences in which Mrs. Whitman sets forth her own point of view: —

"Wanting in that supreme central force or faculty of the mind, whose function is a God-conscious and God-adoring faith, Edgar Poe sought earnestly and conscientiously for such solution of the great problems of thought as were alone attainable to an intellect hurled from its balance by the abnormal preponderance of the analytical and imaginative faculties."

[1] [Horrible monster.]
[2] This holds true, unfortunately, of the still later complete edition, by Messrs. Stedman and Woodberry.
[3] *Edgar Poe and his Critics*, p. 59.

"These far-wandering comets, not less than 'the regular, calm stars,' obey a law and follow a pathway that has been marked out for them by infinite Wisdom and essential Love." [1]

The theism exemplified in these passages appears to be the reigning religion in the United States, and is doubtless common enough everywhere else; and it certainly seems sufficiently clear that for people whose minds oscillate between conceptions of Poe's intellect as hurled from its balance and as wisely guided by a loving God who deprived it of the faculty of God-consciousness — for such people the "true point of view from which his genius should be regarded" must indeed be far to seek. That point of view can hardly be one from which you explain the infinite while perplexed by the finite; it is to be attained not *à priori* but *à posteriori;* that is to say, Poe's life and his works have to be studied with an eye, not to discovering a scheme of infinite wisdom, or even to finding a "point of view," but simply to the noting of the facts and the arranging of them. The true point of view is surely that from which you see things.

Much, of course, depends on methods of observation. At the outset, we are confronted by the facts that Poe's father married imprudently at eighteen, and that the lady was an actress. That is either a mere romantic detail or a very important fact, according as Poe is regarded as an organism or as an immortal soul. Here indeed, the point of view means the seeing or the not seeing of certain facts; but as most people to-day have some little faith in the operation of heredity, it may be assumed that the significance of Poe's parentage is admitted when it is mentioned. Recent investigators have come to the conclusion that David Poe was not merely romantic and reckless, but given to the hard drinking which was so common in the Southern States in his time; and thus, coming of a father of intemperate habits and headlong impulses, and of a mother whose very profession meant excitement and shaken nerves, Poe had before him tremendous probabilities of an erratic career. As fate would have it, the man who adopted the little Edgar on the death of the young parents (they both died of consumption) did everything to aggravate and nothing to counteract the temperamental flaws of the life he took in charge. We know that Edgar's brother, William Henry, who may or may not have been equally ill-managed by the friend who adopted him, turned out a clever scapegrace and died young; but certain it is that Mr. Allan was

[1] *Edgar Poe and his Critics*, pp. 33–34, 60.

no wise guardian to Edgar. The habits of the house were Southern and convivial; the clever child was petted, flattered, and spoiled; and it seems that Poe might have been made a toper by his surroundings even if he had no bias that way. Again, Mr. Allan was rich, and Poe had no prospective necessities of labour, no sense of obligation to be methodical; which makes it the more natural that his later life should be a failure financially, and the more remarkable that he should exhibit unusual powers of close and orderly thought. Finally, the boy's shifting life; his four years' schooling in England (where in the opinion of his teacher, his guardian did him serious harm by giving him too much pocket-money), and later at Richmond; his brief military cadetship at West Point, his headlong trip to Europe, and his year's stay there, of which nothing seems to be now known, and his studentship at the Virginia University — all tended to deprive him of the benefits of habit, which might conceivably have been some safeguard against his hereditary instability; and at the same time his training tended to develop, though inadequately and at random, his purely intellectual powers, while supplying him with no moral guidance worth mentioning. Such a character required the very wisest management: it had either bad management or none. It was therefore only too natural that the youth should be self-willed and insubordinate at West Point, and much given to gambling at college.

The other side of the picture, however, must be kept in view. While apparently loosely related to life in respect of the normal affections (he seems to have had little communication with his brother, no very strong attachment to his sister, and no attachment to Mr. Allan), he was very far from being the unfeeling and loveless creature he was so long believed to be. He seems to have described himself accurately when he wrote of his uncommon and invariable tenderness to animals; and the intensity of his affections where they were really called out is revealed by the story of his passionate grief on the death of the lady, the mother of one of his comrades, who befriended him in schoolboyhood. Abnormal in his grief as in the play of all his faculties, and blindly bent even then on piercing the mystery of the sepulchre, the boy passed long night vigils on her grave, clinging, beyond death, to the first being he had learned utterly to love. And an important statement is made as to the manner of his marriage by a lady who knew him and his connections well.[1] The majority of respectable readers, probably,

[1] Art. "Last Days of E. A. Poe," in *Scribner's Magazine*, March, 1878.

have regarded Poe's marriage to his beautiful and penniless young cousin as one of his acts of culpable recklessness; but according to the account in question, it was rather a deed of generous devotion. He had acted as a boy tutor to Virginia Clemm in her early childhood, and when, after his final rupture with Mr. Allan, he went to reside with his aunt,[1] the young girl acquired a worship for him. According to this story it was on Mrs. Clemm's impressing on him, when he contemplated leaving her house after being an inmate for two years, the absolute absorption of the girl in his existence, that he proposed the marriage. She was hardly fourteen, poor child, but she was of the precocious Southern blood, and her youth seems to have made her mother only the more fearful of the effect of separation from her adored cousin. Poe's marriage was on this view an act not of free choice but of prompt generosity. Whatever the truth may be, he was a very good husband. Devoted as she was up to her death, Virginia never gave him the full intellectual companionship he would have sought in a wife; but there is now no pretence that he ever showed her the shadow of unkindness, and it is admitted that in her last days he was tenderness itself. All which is a fair certificate of good domestic disposition, as men and poets go.

What then was there in Poe's life as a whole to justify detraction? When the testimony is fully sifted the discreditable charges are found to be: first and chiefly, that he repeatedly gave way to his hereditary vice of alcoholism; secondly, that he committed one lapse from literary integrity; thirdly, that he was often splenetic and sometimes unjust as a critic; fourthly, that he showed ingratitude and enmity to some who befriended him. Setting aside his youthful passionateness and prodigality, that is now the whole serious moral indictment against him. The insinuations and assertions of Griswold, to the effect that he committed more than one gross outrage, are found to be either proven false or wholly without proof; and many of the biographer's aspersions on his disposition have been indignantly repudiated by those who knew him well — as Mr. G. R. Graham and Mr. N. P. Willis, both of whom employed him. As for the alleged ingratitude to unnamed friends, it seems only fair to ask whether any such faults, if real, may not

[1] Mr. Ingram says (*Life*, I, 106–7) that Mrs. Clemm "never did know" where Poe went after the rupture (1831); and that "extant correspondence proves" that Poe did not live with her in 1831–2, "and, apparently, that he never lived with her until after his marriage."

be attributed to the havoc ultimately wrought in Poe's delicately balanced temperament by fits of drinking.[1] Mr. R. H. Stoddard[2] has given an account of some very singular ill-treatment he received from Poe while the latter edited the *Broadway Journal* — treatment which at once suggests some degree of cerebral derangement on Poe's part; and a story told of his resenting a home-thrust of criticism by a torrent of curses, goes to create the same impression. This was in his latter years, at a time when a thimbleful of sherry could excite him almost to frenzy, and when, according to one hostile writer, he had developed incurable cerebral disease. Setting aside the question of his fairness as a critic, which will be discussed further on, there remains to be considered his one alleged deflection from literary honesty. He did publish under his own name a manual of Conchology which apparently incorporated, without acknowledgment, passages from a work by Captain Brown published in Glasgow; and it is alleged by Griswold, and implied by Mr. Stoddard, that the American book is substantially based on Brown's. But there is really no proof of anything like important plagiarism, and the slightness of the evidence is very suggestive of a weak case. Mr. Stoddard, who exhibits a distinct and not altogether unnatural bias against his subject, prints parallel passages which do seemingly amount to "conveyance"; but he unjustifiably omits to answer the statement on the other side, that the *Manual of Conchology* was compiled under the supervision of Professor Wyatt; that Poe contributed largely to it; that the publishers accordingly wished to use his popular name on the title-page; and that, finally, the book, though corresponding in part to Brown's because avowedly based, like that, on the system of Lamarck, is essentially an independent compilation. Such is the statement of Professor Wyatt, and the matter ought to be easily settled.[3] What Mr. Stoddard does is to convey the impression that Poe copied wholesale, though only a few appropriations are cited. Now, whereas naked appropriation of another man's ideas in his own wording, in a work of ostensibly original reasoning or imagination, must be pronounced a serious act of literary dishonesty, the

[1] In the memoir prefixed to the last edition of Poe's works, it is stated that he resorted at times to opium as well as to alcohol; and this seems likely enough. In that case there would be all the more risk of bad effects on character.

[2] In his memoir in Widdleton's ed. of Poe, 1880.

[3] See, on this and all other matters concerning Poe, the *Life* by John H. Ingram, a work of painstaking vindication which earns the gratitude of every one interested in Poe. The American *Life*, by W. Gill, is mainly compiled from it.

incorporation of some one else's paragraphs or sentences is so common a practice among scientific and other compilers, that it may reasonably be classed as a conventionally innocent proceeding, not even to be likened to those innumerable acts of lax morality in commerce for which it is almost idle to denounce any offender singly. In any case, Poe never pretended to be doing anything more than a compilation, and he had a colleague in the work. For the rest, there is ample evidence as to his scrupulous honesty and fidelity in his relations with his literary employers; and it is not recorded that he ever inflicted loss on any man, any more than unkindness on those about him. We sum up, then, that Poe's mental and moral balance, delicate by inheritance, was injured by the drinking habits into which he repeatedly relapsed; but that his constitution was such that what was to others extremely moderate indulgence could be for him disastrous excess.

Now, it might be argued with almost irresistible force that such a case as this is one for pity and not for blame — that a man of Poe's heredity and obvious predisposition to brain disease is to be looked on in the same spirit as is one who suffers from downright hereditary insanity. But, seeing it may be replied that all vices are similarly the result of hereditary and brain conditions, and that we should either blame all offenders to whom we allow freedom of action, or none, I am inclined to rest the defence of Poe on a somewhat different basis; and to substitute for a deprecatory account of his moral disadvantages the assertion that morally he compares favourably with the majority of his fellow-creatures. Whether that is either a vain paradox or a piece of cynicism let the reader judge.

It is, one sees, the habit of most people, in judging of any character in favour of which they are not prejudiced, to try it by the standard of an imaginary personage who is without any serious fault. The strength of this disposition can be seen at any performance of a melodrama in a theatre, the great body of the audience being obviously in strong sympathy with virtues of which there is reason to doubt their own general possession; and strongly hostile even to vices which they may fairly be presumed in many cases to share. In the phrase of Montesquieu, "mankind, although reprobates in detail, are always moralists in gross." As for the general disposition to condemn the vices we are not inclined to, that may be dismissed as a commonplace. And yet it is one of the rarest things to find these facts recognized in conduct. A rational

moral code is hardly ever to be met with. Intemperance — to bring the question to the concrete — may be reduced in common with most other vices to an admitted lack of self-control; but it is clearly blamed for some other reason than that it evidences such a defect. If a man or woman falls hopelessly in love, however abject be the loss of self-command, the average outsider never thinks of calling the enamoured one vicious merely on account of the extremity of the passion. That, on the contrary, is regarded by many people as rather a fine thing. If, again, a man is either extremely selfish or extremely prodigal, while he may be censured for his fault, he is still held to be less blamable than the mere intemperate drinker. Sometimes the censure passed on the latter is justified on the score that his vice impoverishes others; but this is not always so; and in any case the selfish or ill-natured man and the spendthrift may do equal injury to the happiness of others. The truth is that the revulsion against the drunkard's vice arises from a keen sense of the physical degradation it works in its subject; and how strong and how instinctive this is can be told by many men who have contemplated in helpless fury the excesses of relatives or dear friends. In these cases severe blame may be justified by the feeling that the keenest reprobation is necessary to sting the drunkard into moral reaction; but it would be difficult to show that when a man is dead it is equitable or reasonable to apply the same degree of blame to him in reckoning his relation to his fellows. All criticism of dead celebrities should be regulated by two considerations: first, the risk or absence of risk that omission to censure for certain faults may encourage the living to repeat them; second, the need or otherwise for resisting any tendency to blame certain faults unduly. I confess I can see no other safe or rational principle on which to apply, in moral criticism of the dead, the general law that men's actions are the outcome of their antecedents and environment. If so much be conceded, it must be allowed that there is no more need to-day to denounce Poe for his unhappy vice than to asperse Charles Lamb — which Carlyle, however, has done with the self-righteousness of the chief of Pharisees. Nobody is likely to be encouraged in tippling by the fact that we speak with tender pity of Lamb's failing. The query —

> Who wouldn't take to drink if drink'll
> Make a man like Rip Van Winkle?

is not serious.

No one in these days, indeed, does think it necessary to pass damnatory sentence on Lamb;[1] and the difference between the ordinary judgments on Lamb and Poe is a striking sample of the capriciousness of average morality. Lamb's weakness for gin is regarded as morally on a level with his poor sister's chronic homicidal mania; and of course, strictly speaking, his misfortune was as much a matter of cerebral constitution as hers. But surely if Mary Lamb is to be spoken of with pure pity for that during a fit of madness she caused the death of her beloved mother, and certainly if Charles is to be similarly pitied, we are committed to speaking gently of such a case as Poe's. Yet people whose feeling for Lamb is entirely affectionate speak of Poe with austere disapproval; and I cannot but think that the explanation of this and much other asperity towards Poe's memory is the singular quality of his literary work, especially of his tales. It has been remarked a hundred times that these are unique in literature in their almost complete destitution in the moral element, commonly so-called. They are one and all studies either of peculiar incident, intellectual processes, or strange idiosyncrasy; and the ordinary reader, accustomed in fiction to a congenial atmosphere of moral feeling, and to judicial contrasts of character such as he sees and makes in actual life, becomes chilled and daunted in the eerie regions to which Poe carries him. The common result seems to be the conclusion that the story-teller was lacking in moral feeling; and though every one does not give effect to his conclusion as the Rev. Mr. Gilfillan did, such a conviction is of course not compatible with sympathy. How crudely and cruelly people can act on such semi-instinctive and unreasoned judgments is shown in the correspondence between Mrs. Whitman and Poe during the period of their engagement. "You do *not* love me," writes Poe passionately, "or you would have felt too thorough a sympathy with the sensitiveness of my nature to have so wounded me as you have done with this terrible passage of your letter — 'How often I have heard it said of you, He has great intellectual power, but no principle — no moral sense.'" One is disposed to echo the first clause; but the blow which Poe feels so acutely is only one of those moral stupidities of which naturally tender-hearted women are capable precisely because their moral and affectional sensibilities at times overbalance their

[1] Mr. Birrell, in his essay on Charles Lamb (*Obiter Dicta*, 2d series, p. 229), generously exclaims against some who do bestow on Lamb an odious pity. Save in the case of Carlyle, I had not before seen any trace of this.

common sense. Nothing could be more witlessly and inexcusably cruel, and at the same time nothing could be more absurd; for if Poe really were without principle any protests of his to the contrary could be worth nothing; and if the accusation were false he had been ruthlessly insulted to no purpose; but the cruelty was probably unconscious, or nearly so. Poor Mrs. Whitman wrote, as lovers will, to extract an assurance which could have no value in the eye of reason, but which emotion craved; for the moment half believing what she said, but wishing to be disabused of her suspicion by a passionate denial. That she obtained. The most fortunate thing for a man so impeached would be the possession of a strong sense of humour, though that might involve a coolness of head which would jeopardize the amour. But poor Poe, wounded as he was, took God to witness that "With the exception of some follies and excesses, which I bitterly lament, but to which I have been driven by intolerable sorrow, and which are hourly committed by others without attracting any notice whatever, I can call to mind no act of my life which would bring a blush to my cheek — or to yours." And after alluding to the malignant attacks that had been made on him, for one of which he brought a successful libel action, and the enmity he had set up by his uncompromising criticisms, he cries: "And you know all this — *you* ask *why* I have enemies. . . . Forgive me if there be bitterness in my tone." On which Mr. Ingram warmly comments that the man who wrote so must have been sincere. It is hardly necessary to urge it. Mrs. Whitman did but echo the idle verdict of conventional minds on an abnormal nature. With fuller knowledge she wrote after his death that, "so far from being selfish or heartless, his devotional fidelity to the memory of those he loved would by the world be regarded as fanatical;" [1] and all the evidence goes to show that, whatever were his faults of taste as a critic, his moral attitude to his fellow-creatures was that of one who was, as he claims for himself, quixotically high-minded. The truth is, an extensive fallacy underlies the aversion which many people have for Poe — the fallacy, namely, of assuming that a large share of what is vaguely called moral or human sentiment, in an author or in any one else, implies a security for right feeling or conduct; and that the absence of such sentiment from an author's fiction, or from any one's talk, implies a tendency to wrong-doing. And the same fallacy, I think, lurks under the ob-

[1] *Edgar Poe and his Critics*, p. 48.

servation that Poe's mind, if not immoral, was non-moral. The assumption in question is a sentimentality that is discredited by accurate observation of life. We know, as a matter of fact, that Poe's attachments, once formed, were deep and intensely faithful; nothing, for instance, could be closer or lovelier than the tie between him and Mrs. Clemm: and his sensitiveness was extreme where his affections were concerned, though his friendly employer Willis speaks of him as a man who in his business life "never smiled or spoke a propitiatory or deprecating word." In fact, if Poe's private life be compared with that of Hawthorne before the latter's marriage, Poe will seem the man of domestic and sociable tendencies, and the other a loveless egoist. His son-in-law tells us that Hawthorne had very little intercourse with his mother and sisters while living in the same house with them, and that he frequently had his meals left for him at his locked door.[1] Southey, too, saw little of his family. Yet no one shivers over Hawthorne and Southey as minds without hearts.

To return, in a perfectly dispassionate spirit, to Lamb, we see that his wealth of kindly sympathy did not save him from alcoholism; and it could easily be shown that a great many moralists have been either gravely immoral characters or unamiable and variously objectionable. Many of us have never been able to regard Dante as a satisfactory personality, with his irrational and capriciously cruel code and his general inhumanity; and a good many will agree that Carlyle, who was always moralizing, was prone to gross injustice, and presents a rather mixed moral spectacle in his own life. The slight on Poe's moral nature was first published by the sentimental Griswold, who is proved to have been a peculiarly mean and malignant slanderer;[2] and the moral Mr. Gilfillan invented a gross calumny. Run down the list of men of genius of modern times who have discussed conduct and human nature, and you will find an extremely large proportion against whom could be charged blemishes of character and conduct from

[1] Mr. Henry James's *Hawthorne*, p. 38, citing Mr. Lathrop.

[2] Of Griswold Mr. Ingram writes (*Academy*, October 13, 1883) that he "bore too unsavoury a character for public examination; but those interested in the subject may be referred to his own account (in the British Museum) why he repudiated his second wife. Thackeray, having proved him a liar, told him so publicly, and would not touch his proffered hand; while Dickens convicted him of fraud, and made his employers pay for it." Poe's review of Griswold's *Poets and Poetry of America* shows (imprudently enough) the small esteem in which he held his future biographer, who seems to have made or kept up his acquaintance in order to retaliate for the critique in question.

which Poe was free. The ferocity and fanaticism of Dante, the grossness of Chaucer, the hard marital selfishness of Milton, the brutality of Luther, the boorishness of Johnson, the ripe self-love of Wordsworth, the malice of Pope, the egoism of Goethe, the murky and selfish spleen of Carlyle, the bigotry of Southey — all these are repellent and anti-social qualities which cannot be charged against Edgar Poe. In short, the ideal man of lively moral feeling and entirely beneficent conduct, by contrast with whom Poe is seen to be an incomplete human being, has never existed in flesh and blood; and if we take the rational course of striking an average of poor humanity we shall find, as before submitted, that our subject does not fall below it. We may even go further. In regard to the widespread and false notion that Poe was a libertine, we may indorse the assertion of Mr. Stedman "that professional men and artists, in spite of a vulgar belief to the contrary, are purity itself compared with men engaged in business, and idle men of the world." [1] Let us in fairness confess that the average man or woman is likely to be one or other of these things — narrow, or bigoted, or cowardly, or fickle, or mean, or gross, or faithless, or coldly selfish, or disingenuous, or hard, or slanderous, or recklessly unjust; though one or other of these qualities may coexist with generosity, or philanthropy, or probity. If we recognize so much, we shall cease to sermonize on Poe's failings; and proceed rather to consider how rare and how fine his work was.

Yet another fallacy, however — to call it by no worse name — blocks for some the way to a sound appreciation. One American critic,[2] appealing to the prevailing dislike of Poe in the States, has grounded a sweeping depreciation of his work on the proposition that he was subject to brain epilepsy. On that head, clearly, there is no need for friendlier people to wish to make out a negative. To begin with, there is independent and unprejudiced testimony that Poe suffered from a brain trouble; and whether or not that trouble was cerebral epilepsy is a question of detail chiefly important to thoughtful specialists. During the serious illness which fell on Poe after his wife's death, Mrs. Clemm's nursing labours were shared by a true and valued friend of the little family, Mrs. Marie Louise Shew, who was a doctor's only daughter, and had received a medical education; and this lady has written as follows: —

[1] *Edgar Allan Poe*, p. 92.
[2] Writing in *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. X, 1875.

"I made my diagnosis, and went to the great Dr. Mott with it. I told him that at best, when Mr. Poe was well, his pulse beat only ten regular beats, after which it suspended, or intermitted (as doctors say). I decided that in his best health he had lesion of one side of the brain, and as he could not bear stimulants or tonics, without producing insanity, I did not feel much hope that he could be raised up from brain fever brought on by extreme suffering of mind and body — actual want and hunger and cold having been borne by this heroic husband in order to supply food, medicine, and comforts to his dying wife — until exhaustion and lifelessness were so near at every reaction of the fever that even sedatives had to be administered with extreme caution." [1]

The latter details may be noted as telling us something of Poe's moral nature; the diagnosis as a fairly decisive deliverance on the brain question, especially when taken in connection with other medical evidence, and testimonies as to the startling effect of a mouthful of sherry or even a glass of beer on Poe at times. There is altogether good reason to hold that his brain was diseased. But what then? To say nothing of the well-worn saw that great wits have their place near the region of madness, biologists [2] have told us that cerebral and other disease may intelligibly be and has actually been a cause of exceptional intellectual capacity.[3] What of Cuvier's hydrocephalus and Keats's precocious maturity? Even scrofula, and worse affections than that, have been maintained or surmised to promote cerebration: the formula being that certain conditions which are pathologically classed as morbid are psychologically important though impermanent variations. Cromwell's inner life has phenomena in some points analogous to Poe's; and if it comes to epilepsy, we have to reckon with a confident classification of Mahomet among that order of sufferers. Lamb was for a time in his youth actually insane. But why multiply cases? In what other instance has it been proposed to make light of a man's mental achievements because his brain is known to have been flawed? I am not aware that any deliberate attempt was ever made to belittle what merits Cowper has, because of his affliction; or that Comte's serious antagonists have ever given countenance to a condemnation of his philosophy as a whole on the strength of his fit of alienation, even though mad enough passages can easily be

[1] Ingram's *Life of Poe*, II, 115.

[2] This was written before the thesis of "the insanity of genius" had become popular.

[3] The assailant knows as much, for he cites Dr. Maudsley as "very positive in his opinion that the world is indebted for a great part of its originality, and for certain special forms of intellect, to individuals who . . . have sprung from families in which there is some predisposition to epileptic insanity." But the attack is as destitute of coherence as of justice and fitness of tone.

cited from his works. It has been left for an American, writing almost unchallenged by the literary class in Poe's native land, to proceed from an argument that Poe was an epileptic to a monstrous corollary of unmeasured detraction from almost every species of credit he has ever received.[1] Baudelaire, discussing Griswold's biography, asked whether in America they have no law against letting curs into the cemeteries: and it is hardly going too far to say that this latest attack on a great memory would never have had even a hearing in a well-ordered literary republic. To discuss it in detail would be to concede too much; but I have thought it well to cite the attack with the note that not only has no adequate recognition been given in America to Poe's intellectual eminence (I exclude the friendly memoirs and vindications), but this extravagantly wrong-headed denial of it secures the vogue due to a true estimate.

The ill-meant aspersion, let us hope, will after all make for a kindlier feeling, among those at least whose good-will a man of letters need wish to have for his memory. In any case, it is incredible that any literary reputation should be forever measured on such principles as those above glanced at. Whatever be the whole explanation of the treatment Poe has received in his own country, whether it be his small affinity to the national life or the abundance of the ill-will he aroused by pitiless criticism of small celebrities, criticism in the States must needs come in time to the temperate study of his work and his endowment on their merits. What follows is an attempt in that direction.

[1] To show how far malice may go astray in reasoning from misfortune to demerit, it may be worth while to point to the absolute failure of this writer's attempt to make Poe's brain trouble a means of discrediting his work. Poe, he tells us, passed through three psychological periods: the first, one in which he "seems to depend for artistic effect on minuteness of detail," as in the *Descent into the Maelstrom*, *The Gold Bug*, the *Case of Monsieur Valdemar*, and *Hans Pfaall* ("imitated," says the writer, with his usual culpable inaccuracy, "from the *Moon Hoax*"); the second, a time of predilection for minute analysis, such as is shown in *The Mystery of Marie Roget;* and the third, a spell of morbid introspection, producing such tales as *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Now, what are the facts? The last-mentioned story was published in 1839; *Ligeia* — a story in the same "morbid" taste — in 1838; *Berenice*, *Morella*, and *Shadow*, all productions of the weird order, in 1835; *Silence* in 1838; and the eminently introspective tale of *William Wilson* in 1839; while *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar* appeared in 1845; *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841, and *Marie Roget* in 1842. Thus we have the works of "morbid introspection" *before* the specifically cited studies in minute detail and minute analysis — the *Usher* story before the *Marie Roget* and the *Valdemar;* and such a production as *Morella* almost contemporary with *Hans Pfaall*. The theory of development breaks down at every point.

II

It is worthy of note that fully nine-tenths of the criticism passed on Poe, appreciative and otherwise, has been directed to his small body of poetry. The fact serves at once to prove the one-sidedness of the average literary man and the range of Poe's power. He had a working knowledge of astronomy, of navigation, of mechanics, and of physics; he certainly compiled a manual of conchology, and had at least dipped into entomology; he could work out ciphers in half a dozen languages; he delighted in progressions of close and sustained reasoning; he had a decided capacity for logic and philosophy; he eagerly followed and easily assimilated, or even in part anticipated, the modern physical theories of the universe; he was a keen and scientific literary critic; and in addition to all this he produced some of the most remarkable imaginative writing and some of the finest poetry of the century. But his critics have been, with very few exceptions, men of purely literary equipment; verse-writers and bellettrists and story-tellers, who judge only verse and prose and character. Sharing their deprivations, I have gone through most of their writings on the watch for an estimate of the scientific and constructive capacity shown in certain of the Tales, and have found an almost unanimous and doubtless judicious silence on the subject. An occasional non-committal phrase about the *Eureka*, and a few generalities on the scientific element in the Tales, represent the critical commentary on the ratiocinative side of Poe's intellect. Now, to treat his verse as his most significant product is to ignore half his remarkableness, and to miss those kinds of strength and eminence in his mind which most effectively outweigh the flaws of his character and the occasional exorbitances of his judgment. Save in his own country, indeed, the Tales have had popular recognition enough. Poe's countrymen never bought up Griswold's edition of his works, and have till quite recently been without a complete collection of them; but Mr. Gill has calculated that while the poems are five-fold more popular in England than in America, the stories are even more widely admired among us; and they have been thoroughly naturalized in France in a complete and admirable translation, chiefly by Baudelaire; besides being reproduced to a greater or less extent in nearly every other European language. Seeing that they were eagerly read on their first appearance in America, it

must be assumed that, as Mr. Gill suggests, the public there were scared off by Griswold's slanders and the consequent myth. But if, with all this European vogue for the Tales, critics continue to descant chiefly on the poetry, the inference as to its impressive quality is irresistible.

Perhaps by reason of the sub-rational tendency to disparage specially an author of one's own country who is loudly praised by foreigners, some living American writers have spoken with absolute contempt of Poe's poetry. Mr. Henry James, for instance, has a strange phrase about his "very valueless verses";[1] and Mr. Stoddard's strongest feeling in the matter appears to be an aversion to the refrains — perhaps not an unnatural attitude towards Poe on the part of a critic who believes a poet may have too much art. In these circumstances it may still be expedient to follow Mr. Stedman in bearing witness to the quality of Poe's poetry. It is perhaps true, as has been said by Oliver Wendell Holmes, that there is almost no poet between whose best and worst verse there is a wider disparity; but that is rather by reason of the fineness of the good than of the badness of the bad; and the latter, in any case, consists simply of the long poems of Poe's youth — *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane,* and the *Scenes from Politian.* Mr. Lang, in editing the whole, has not scrupled to indicate his feeling that these are hardly worth reading; and while one feels that in that view perhaps the proper course were not to edit them, so much may be conceded. In regard to some of the successful poems, again, there is to be reckoned with the disenchanting effect of extreme popularity; an influence of the most baffling sort, often blurring one's critical impression in a way for which there is hardly any remedy. The choicest air, as it had once seemed, may be made to acquire associations of the barrel organ; and it may ultimately become a fine question whether it was not a vice in it to be so associable. One may brazen out one's early attachment, as, I fancy, Mr. Arnold did when he lately insisted that *Lucy Gray* was a "beautiful success"; but when loyalty to an old opinion is justified merely by its survival, criticism is turned out of doors. So that, lest we are insidiously led into committing the unpardonable

[1] In the essay on Baudelaire in the volume *French Poets and Novelists*, ed. 1878, p. 76. Since this essay was first printed I find that in the Tauchnitz edition of his book Mr. James has altered "valueless" to "superficial." I let my criticism (*infra*) stand as it was written, only pointing out that the change of epithet is significant of weakness of ground, and that the second form is even worse than the first. When was verse so aspersed before?

critical sin of certificating popular poetry by its popularity, it will be well to consider briefly in the concrete the merits of *The Raven*. Many of us, I suspect, have at one time developed a suspicion that that much-recited work is not poetry of the first order; and the suspicion is deepened when we reflect that the distinction of learning it by heart in our youth was conferred on it in common with other works as to which there can now be no critical dubiety. It is difficult to gainsay Mr. Lang when he impugns its right, and that of *Lenore*, to the highest poetical honours: both poems, like *The Bells*, have a certain smell of the lamp, an air of compilation, a suspicion of the inorganic. And yet a studious rereading of *The Raven* may awaken some remorse for such detractions. Not only has it that impressiveness of central conception which is never lacking in Poe's serious work, but it is really a memorable piece of technique. It is hardly possible to say where inspiration lacks and mechanism intervenes: the poem is an effective unity. Some hold that the touches of plagiarism — the "uncertain" sound of the "purple curtain," and the collocation of "desolate" and "desert land," both echoes from Mrs. Browning's *Lady Geraldine*[1] — serve to discredit the whole; but that is surely false criticism. The problem is, whether the appropriations are assimilated; and they clearly are. Mrs. Browning herself expressed the commanding individuality of the work in the phrase "this power which is felt." The poem has that distinctive attribute of most of Poe's writing, the pregnancy of idea, the compulsive imagination which fascinates and dominates the reader. One feels behind it a creative and sustaining power, a power as of absolute intellect. To feel specifically the impact of this influence, let the reader compare the poem as a whole with *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, and note how, ample as is the poetess's gift of speech, choice as are her harmonies, and fortunate as are many of her lines, there is yet a something spasmodic and convulsive pervading the whole, a tone of passionate weakness, in full keeping with the hysterical character of the girlish hero, which gives a quite fatal emphasis to the frequent lapses of expression, these seeming to belong to weakness and slovenliness; while in reading *The Raven* there is hardly for a moment room for a disrespectful sensation. The imperious

[1] One of the disputed points as to which there should never have been any dispute is the question of priority in these passages. One critic, who imputes plagiarisms to Poe, brusquely asserts that Mrs. Browning was the imitator. The plain facts are that her poem was published in 1844, and Poe's in 1845, and that Poe admired her poetry greatly.

brain of the "maker," as the old vernacular would straightforwardly name him, stamps its authority on every line; and the subtle sense of the artist's puissance remains unaffected by the despairing avowal of the conclusion. The speaker may sink prostrate, but the poem is never shaken in its serene movement and marble firmness of front. It has "cette extraordinaire élévation, cette exquise délicatesse, cet accent d'immortalité qu' Edgar Poe exige de la Muse," [1] remarked on by Baudelaire; and nothing in the poem is more remarkable than the Apollonian impunity with which the poet is able to relax and colloquialize his phraseology. Mrs. Browning could not venture without disaster on such an infusion of realism into idealism as the "Sir, said I, or Madam," and "the fact is, I was napping:" her Pegasus, in view of his habitual weakness of knee, would be felt to have stumbled in such a line as: —

"Though its answer little meaning, *little relevancy bore*" —

where Poe sweeps us over by his sheer unswerving intentness on his theme. The explanation seems to be that the writer himself is without apparent consciousness of artistic fallibility — that he is pure intellect addressing an abstract reader; and that, as he never seems to strain after words, he has a regal air of having said precisely what should be said; so that when we read of "a stately raven of the *saintly* days of yore," we hesitate to impugn the fitness of the term. What, then, is it in *The Raven* that takes it out of the first rank of poetry? Well, then, first, the admixture of simple oddity, which is disallowed by Poe's own law that poetry is the "rhythmical creation of beauty"; and, second, the decomposability of the structure at two points, namely, the factitious rustling of the curtains, which have no business to rustle, and the falling of the shadow, which has no right to fall.[2] These touches are "willed"; and, on reflection, have the effect of obtruding their art upon us; whereas the perfect poem must seem homogeneous and inevitably what it is. It is sometimes argued that the very continuity and clearness of the tale in themselves vitiate the work, as dispelling true glamour; and assuredly, though

[1] [That extraordinary elevation, that exquisite delicacy, that accent of immortality which Edgar Poe demands of the Muse.]

[2] Poe, in a letter given by Mr. Ingram (*Life*, I, 275), says his idea about the light was "the bracket candelabrum affixed against the wall, high up above the door and bust, as is often seen in the English palaces (!), and even in some of the better houses of New York." It will not do.

it is made apparently certain by Poe's own avowal that *The Genesis of the Raven* was a hoax,[1] there can be little doubt that the poem was most carefully put together. But to depreciate a work of art on such a ground as that is a quite illicit proceeding. Results must be judged on their merits. And, indeed, the mere flaws in the rationale of the piece, scarcely perceptible as they are, would not in themselves suffice to invalidate it, any more than the clear flaw in the logic of the second-last stanza of Keats's *Ode to the Nightingale* discredits that: they do but accentuate the force of the objection to the un-elevated though still dignified tone of the stanzas and the consequent narrative stamp on the whole. But even in making these admissions, the lover of verse must insist on the singular power of the composition; which remains more extraordinary than much other work that is more strictly successful. Poe's second-best verse has a distinction of its own.

If, then, *The Raven* is thus dismissed; and if, as must needs be, *Lenore* is pronounced a piece of brilliant mosaic, and *The Bells* is classed as a fine piece of literary architecture rather than a poetic creation, we shall have left but a small body of work from which to choose our specimens of Poe's fine poetry. But what remains will serve. Poe never professed to make poetry his main aim, or even an aim at all: it was his "passion"; and what is here contended is that, many-sided as he was, he had a poetic faculty of the highest kind, among other powers which few or no other poets have possessed. The decisive credentials of perfect poetry are an organic oneness of substance, that substance being of a purer essence than ordinary speech; a quality of meaning which pierces to the sense without the methodic specification of prose; and a charm of rhythm and phrase which is a boon in itself, permanently recognizable as such apart from any truth enclosed. These, broadly speaking, are the "values" of poetry; and he who says Poe's verse is valueless must, I think, be adjudged to be without the poetic sense. Mr. James must presumably have meant one of two things: either that Poe's poetry conveys no moral teachings or descriptions of life and scenery — these constituting the "valuable" element in poetry for those to whom its special qualities do not appeal — or that its art is commonplace. The first objection need only be conceived to be dismissed; the second, supposing it to have been that intended, which I doubt, would need no answer beyond a few quotations. Among Poe's early poems is one *To Helen*, which he is

[1] Professor Minto, however, declined to believe that it really was so.

said to have represented as being composed when he was fourteen, the *Helen*, on that view, being supposed to be the lady, mother of his school friend, who was kind to the boy, and whose death he so passionately mourned. In view at once of Poe's habit of mystification and of the nature of the poem, I cannot believe that is the true account of the matter. The verses are not those of a boy of fourteen. But they were undoubtedly written in Poe's teens, and I cite them as constituting one of the most ripely perfect and spiritually charming poems ever written at that or any age: —

"Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicæan barks of yore
Which gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

"On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home,
To the glory that was Greece,
And [1] the grandeur that was Rome.

"Lo! in yon brilliant window niche,
How statue-like I see thee stand,
Thy agate lamp within thy hand —
Ah, Psyche! from the regions which
Are Holy Land!"

Merely to credit these verses with "Horatian elegance," as some admiring critics have done, is to render them scant justice. They have not only Horace's fastidiousness of touch (with perhaps the single reservation of the unluckily hackneyed "classic face") but the transfiguring aërial charm of pure poetry, which is not in Horace's line. The two closing lines of the middle stanza have passed into the body of choice distillations of language reserved for immortality; and there is assuredly nothing more exquisite in its kind in English literature than the last stanza. To have written such verses is to have done a perfect thing. Turn next to *The Haunted Palace*, an experiment in the perilous field of poetic

[1] Some editions read "To the grandeur." I simply follow that reading which best pleases me. It is interesting to know, by the way, that these famous lines, in the edition of 1831, ran thus: —

"To the beauty of fair Greece
And the grandeur of old Rome."

What a transmutation!

allegory. What poet had before essayed that with perfect success? I will not venture to say that no one has; but I can call to mind no instance. According to Griswold, *The Haunted Palace* is a plagiarism from Longfellow's *Beleaguered City*,[1] a futile imputation, which only serves to help us to a fuller recognition of Poe's success. Personally, I have a certain tenderness for *The Beleaguered City* as being one of the first imaginative poems that impressed my boyhood; but no prejudice of that sort can hinder any one from seeing that the poem is vitiated by its nugatory didacticism — the fatal snare of the allegorist. Mr. James, in his *Hawthorne*, appears to think (though this is not clear) that he has caught Poe condemning himself in a critical declaration against allegory; but I suspect the inconsistency is more apparent than real. Poe almost never, so far as I can see, uses allegory for the purpose of sustaining a thesis, which is the thing he objects to. The generic difference between the allegory of *The Haunted Palace* and that of *The Beleaguered City* is that the latter is a kind of confused sermon, while the other is a pure artistic creation — a changing vision projected for its own sake and yoked to no "moral." Didactic poetry there may be, in a happy imposition of poetic quality on a moral truth, which ordinarily gravitates towards prose; but to make allegory pointedly didactic is deliberately to impose prose on the poetic, and this Poe never does in his poetry proper. He simply limns his image and leaves it, a thing of uncontaminated art. *The Haunted Palace* is the allegory of a brain once of royal power, shrined in noble features, but at length become a haunt of madness — a half-conscious allusion, perhaps, to the poet's own dark destiny; but there is no precept, not even a hint of the ethical: the strange imagination is unrolled in its terrible beauty, and that is all. The singer is a "maker," not a commentator. And then the melody and surprise of the verse!

> "Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
> On its roof did float and flow,
> (This — all this — was in the olden
> Time, long ago);
> And every gentle air that dallied,
> In that sweet day,
> Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,
> A wingéd Odour went away."

[1] The *Palace* appeared first, April, 1839; the *City* in November (Ingram's *Life*, I, 160). And Poe accused Longfellow of imitating *him!*

Longfellow could do some things in rhyme and rhythm, but his genial talent did not accomplish such singing as this, and as little could he compass the serene height of strain which Poe maintains with such certainty.

Every charge of poetic plagiarism against Poe does but establish more clearly his utter originality of method.[1] Mrs. Browning and Longfellow, whom he is charged with imitating, are themselves facile imitators, who, somehow, do not contrive to improve on their originals; but Poe, in the one or two cases in which he really copied in his adult period, lent a new value to what he took. Where he seems to have adopted ideas from others the transmutation is still more striking. A writer already referred to, who is as far astray in laying as in denying charges of plagiarism against Poe, declares that his *Dreamland* "palpably paraphrases Lucian's *Island of Sleep*" — meaning, I suppose, the description of the Island of Dreams in the *True History;* and the statement is so far true that in Lucian there is a Temple of Night in the Island, and that the categories of the dreams include visions of old friends; but to call the poem a paraphrase is absurd. There is all the difference of seventeen hundred years of art between the Greek's semi-serious fantasy and the profound and magical note of Poe's poem: —

> "By a route obscure and lonely,
> Haunted by ill angels only,
> Where an Eidòlon, named Night,
> On a black throne reigns upright,
> I have reached these lands but newly
> From an ultimate dim Thule —
> From a wild, weird clime that lieth sublime,
> Out of SPACE — out of TIME."

Genius, Mr. Arnold has well said, is mainly an affair of energy; and the definition would hold for all the work of Poe, whose creations, in the last analysis, are found to draw their power from the extraordinary intensity which belonged to his every mental opera-

[1] There is a certain air of Nemesis in these charges against Poe, who was apt to be fanatical in imputing plagiarism to others. But it is remarkable that no one has ever pointed out that Poe's own excellent definition of poetry, "the rhythmical creation of beauty" (Essay on *The Poetic Principle*), is a condensation of a sentence by (of all men) Griswold. See Poe's notice of Griswold's *Poets and Poetry of America* (Ingram's ed. of *Works*, IV, 315). It may be noted that Poe's treatment of Griswold in this notice is remarkably friendly; and whatever of offence he may have given his future biographer in his lecture on the same subject, the latter must have been a malignant soul indeed to seek for it, in the face of such amends, the vile revenge he subsequently took.

tion — an intensity perfectly free of violence. Be his fancy ever so shadowy in its inception, he informs it with the impalpable force of intellect till it becomes a vision more enduring than brass. There is no poet who can so "give to aery nothing a local habitation and a name." It was perhaps not so wonderful after all that commonplace people should shun, as hardly belonging to human clay, the personality which brooded out such visions as these: [1] —

"Lo! Death has reared himself a throne
In a strange city, lying alone
Far down within the dim West . . .

"No rays from the Holy Heaven come down
On the long night-time of that town;
But light from out the lurid sea
Streams up the turrets silently —
Gleams up the pinnacles far and free —
Up domes — up spires — up kingly halls —
Up fanes — up Babylon-like walls —
Up shadowy long-forgotten bowers
Of sculptured ivy and stone flowers —
Up many and many a marvellous shrine
Whose wreathéd friezes intertwine
The viol, the violet, and the vine.

"Resignedly beneath the sky
The melancholy waters lie.
So blend the turrets and shadows there
That all seems pendulous in air,
While, from a proud tower in the town,
Death looks gigantically down . . .

"No swellings tell that winds may be
Upon some far-off happier sea —
No heavings hint that winds have been
On seas less hideously serene."

With unwaning vividness the unearthly vision burns itself tremorless upon the void, till it is almost with a shudder of relief that the spellbound reader cons the close: —

"And when, amid no earthly moans,
Down, down that town shall settle hence,
Hell, rising from a thousand thrones,
Shall do it reverence."

[1] In such poems, and in some of the Tales, it may very well be that opium has had some part, as it so clearly had in the happiest inspirations of Coleridge.

Perhaps such terrific imaginings can never be taken into common favour with healthy dwellers in the sunlit world; but it is hard to understand how any, having studied them, can find them forgetable. It cannot for a moment be pretended of these verses, even by the sciolists of criticism, that they lack "inspiration" and spontaneity of movement; detraction must seek other ground. We find, consequently, that the stress of the hostile attack is turned mainly on one poem, in which the poet's customary intension of idea appears to lose itself more or less in a dilettantist ringing of changes on sound. I have no desire to seem in the least degree to stake Poe's reputation on *Ulalume*, which trenches too far on pure mysticism for entire artistic success, and at the same time is marked by an undue subordination of meaning to music; but I cannot help thinking that the dead set made at that piece is unjustifiable. Mr. R. H. Stoddard is exceptionally acrid on the subject.

"I can perceive," he writes, in a memoir of Poe, "no touch of grief in *Ulalume*, no intellectual sincerity, but a diseased determination to create the strange, the remote, and the terrible, and to exhaust ingenuity in order to do so. No healthy mind was ever impressed by *Ulalume*, and no musical sense was ever gratified with its measure, which is little beyond a jingle; and with its repetitions, which add to its length without increasing its general effect, and which show more conclusively than anything else in the language the absurdity of the refrain when it is allowed to run riot, as it does here." [1]

Now, this censure is fatally overdone. Mr. Stoddard had on the very page before admitted that *Ulalume* was, "all things considered, the most singular poem that [Poe] ever produced, if not, indeed, the most singular poem that anybody ever produced, in commemoration of a dead woman." A critic should know his own mind before he begins to write out a judgment. Here we have an explicit admission of the extreme remarkableness of a given poem; then a denial that it ever "impressed a healthy mind"; then an unmeasured allegation that "no musical sense was ever gratified" with its musical elements. Let one stanza answer — the praise of the star Astarte: —

"And I said: 'She is warmer than Dian:
She rolls through an ether of sighs —
She revels in a region of sighs:
She has seen that the tears are not dry on
Those cheeks, where the worm never dies,
And has come past the stars of the Lion
To point us the path to the skies —
To the Lethean peace of the skies —

[1] Memoir in Widdleton's ed. of Poe, p. 130.

Come up, in despite of the Lion,
To shine on us with her bright eyes —
Come up through the lair of the Lion,
With love in her luminous eyes.'"

Mr. Stoddard must be told that there are some of us who do not wish any of these repetitions away, and who think the culminating music is closely analogous to effects produced a hundred times by Mozart and Schubert and Beethoven, who had all some little gift of melody, and were considerably given to the "repetend," as Mr. Stedman happily re-christens the so-called refrain. The above-quoted stanza is the best, no doubt, and there *is* one flaw in it, namely, the "dry on," which is truly an exhaustion of ingenuity; but even here one is struck by the imperial way in which Poe buttresses his lapse with the whole serene muster of his stanza — so curiously different a procedure from the fashion in which Mr. Swinburne, for instance, or even Mr. Browning, scoops a rhyme-borne figure into his verse and, consciously hurrying on, leaves it, in its glaring irrelevance, to put the whole out of countenance. Poe's few deflections from purity of style are dominated by his habitual severity of form. As for the charge of insincerity, it is enough to say that it has been brought against every poet who has artistically expressed a grief; it being impossible for some people to realize that art feeds on deep feelings, not at the moment of their first freshness, but when revived in memory. A more reasonable objection is brought against *Ulalume* on the score of its obscurity; but that too is exaggerated; and the announcement of one critic that it is a "vagary of mere words," of an "elaborate emptiness," is an avowal of defective intelligence. The meaning of the poem is this: the poet has fallen into a revery in the darkness; and his brain — the critic says it was then a tottering brain — is carrying on a kind of dual consciousness, compounded of a perception of the blessed peace of the night and a vague, heavy sense of his abiding grief, which has for the moment drifted into the background. In this condition he does what probably most of us have done in connection with a minor trouble — dreamily asks himself, "What was the shadow that was brooding on my mind, just a little while ago?" and then muses, "If I have forgotten it, why should I wilfully revive my pain, instead of inhaling peace while I may?" This, I maintain, is a not uncommon experience in fatigued states of the brain; the specialty in Poe's case being that the temporarily suspended ache is the woe of a bereavement — a kind of woe which,

after a certain time, however sincere, ceases to be constant, and begins to be intermittent. The Psyche is the obscure whisper of the tired heart, the suspended memory, that will not be wholly appeased with the beauty of the night and the stars; and the poet has but cast into a mystical dialogue the interplay of the waking and the half-sleeping sense, which goes on till some cypress, some symbol of the grave, flashes its deadly message on the shrinking soul, and grief leaps into full supremacy. Supposing Poe's brain to have been undergoing a worsening disease in his later days, this its last melody has even a more deeply pathetic interest than belongs to the theme.

Take finally, as still further test of Poe's poetic gift, the poems *El Dorado*, *Annabel Lee*, and *For Annie*. The first is a brief allegory, with something of a moral, but a moral too pessimistic to have any ethically utilitarian quality; the second a lovely ballad enshrining the memory of his married life; the third a strange song, impersonally addressed to one of the women to whom he transiently turned in his lonesome latter years — a wonderful lullaby in which a dead man is made placidly to exult in his release from life and pain, and in the single remaining thought of the presence of his beloved. In these poems we have the final proof of the inborn singing faculty of Poe. Some of his pieces, as has been already admitted, are works of constructive skill rather than outpourings of lyric fulness; and such a musical stanza as this: —

> "And all my days are trances,
> And all my nightly dreams
> Are where thy dark eye glances,
> And where thy footstep gleams —
> In what ethereal dances!
> By what eternal streams!" —

has perhaps a certain stamp of compilation. But no unprejudiced reader, I think, will fail to discern in the three poems last named a quite unsurpassable limpidity of expression. They evolve as if of their own accord. In *El Dorado* the one central rhyme is reiterated with a perfect simplicity; *Annabel Lee* is almost careless in its childlike directness of phrase; and *For Annie* is almost bald in its beginning. But I know little in the way of easeful word music that will compare with this: —

> "And oh! of all tortures
> That torture the worst
> Has abated — the terrible
> Torture of thirst,

For the napthaline river
Of Passion accurst:
I have drunk of a water
That quenches all thirst:

"Of a water that flows,
With a lullaby sound,
From a spring but a very few
Feet under ground —
From a cavern not very far
Down under ground.

"And ah! let it never
Be foolishly said
That my room it is gloomy,
And narrow my bed;
For man never slept
In a different bed;
And to *sleep*, you must slumber
In just such a bed.

"My tantalized spirit
Here blandly reposes
Forgetting, or never
Regretting its roses —
Its old agitations
Of myrtles and roses:

"For now, while so quietly
Lying, it fancies
A holier odour
About it, of pansies —
A rosemary odour
Commingled with pansies —
With rue and the beautiful
Puritan pansies."

Is there not here that crowning quality of emotional plenitude which, with perfection of form, makes great poetry as distinguished from fine verse: are there not here, in another guise, the urgent throb and brooding pregnancy which give to an andante of Beethoven its deep constraining power? We have all certain passional or sub-judicial preferences in our favourite poetry, setting one masterpiece above others for some subtle magnetism it works on us, we do not quite know how or why. "Huysmans," says a writer of ardently eclectic taste, "goes to my soul like a gold ornament of Byzantine workmanship." [1] Somewhat so might one ex-

[1] Mr. George Moore, *Confessions of a Young Man*, p. 299.

press the mastering charm of those incomparably simple yet flawlessly rhythmical lines.

III

These few extracts are enough to show that as a poet Poe has a commanding distinction; but if we find him remarkable in that regard, what shall we say of the range and calibre of the mind which produced the manifold achievement of his prose? The more one wanders through that, out of all comparison the more extensive part of his work, the more singular appear those estimates of the man which treat him merely as a poet of unhappy life and morbid imagination. Perhaps it is that in all seriousness the literary world inclines to Mr. Swinburne's conviction that poets as such are the guardian angels of mankind, and all other mind-workers their mere satellites; perhaps that, despite Goethe's services to biology, it has a hereditary difficulty in conceiving a poet as an effective intelligence in any other walk than that of his art, and accordingly excludes instinctively from view whatever tends to raise the point. Or is it that the sense of the abnormality of feeling in Poe's verse, and in his best-known stories, gives rise to a vague notion that his performances in the line of normal thought can be of no serious account? It is difficult to decide; but certain it is that most of his critics have either by restrictedness of view or positive misjudgment done him serious wrong.

It is Mr. Henry James who, in a passage already quoted from, makes the remark: "With all due respect to the very original genius of the author of the *Tales of Mystery*, it seems to me that to take him with more than a certain degree of seriousness is to lack seriousness oneself. An enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection." One cannot guess with any confidence as to the precise "degree of seriousness" which Mr. James would concede; or how much seriousness he brings to bear on any of his own attachments; or what the stage of reflection was at which he cultivated an enthusiasm for, say, Théophile Gautier. One therefore hesitates to put oneself in competition with Mr. James in the matter of seriousness of character. But one may venture to suggest that the above passage throws some light on the rather puzzling habit of depreciation of Poe among American men of letters. Themselves given mainly to the study of modern fiction, they seem to measure Poe

only as a fictionist; and, even then, instead of fairly weighing his work on its merits, they test it by the calibre of the people who prefer the *Tales of Mystery* to novels of character. Remembering that as boys they enjoyed Poe when they did not enjoy the novel of character, they decide that the writer who thus appeals to boyish minds can be of no great intellectual account. This is a very fallacious line of reasoning. It would make out Defoe to be an artist of the smallest account, though Mr. James has a way of connecting intellectual triviality with "very original genius," which somewhat confuses the process of inference. It would relegate Swift to a rather low standing, because boys notoriously enjoy *Gulliver's Travels*. That result would surely not do. It surely does not follow that Mr. Stevenson is intellectually inferior to Mr. Howells because the former wrote *Treasure Island*, beloved of boys, while Mr. Howells's books appeal only to people who know something of life. The fair, not to say the scientific method, surely, is to take an author's total performance, and estimate from that his total powers. This, Mr. James has not done, I think, as regards Poe, or he would not have written as he has done about "seriousness"; and, if one may say such a thing without impertinence, the kind of culture specially affected by Mr. James is too much in the ascendant among the very intelligent reading public of the States. These white-handed students of the modern novel are not exactly the people to estimate an endowment such as Poe's.[1]

If one critical impression can be said to be predominant for an attentive reader of Poe's prose, it is perhaps a wondering sense of the perfection which may belong to what Lamb called "the sanity of true genius," even where the genius borders on the formless clime we name insanity. This is no idle paradox. What I say is that while Poe's work again and again gives evidence of a mind tending to alienation, it yet includes a hundred triumphs of impeccable reason; and that for the most part his intellectual faculty is sanity itself. It opens up a curious view of things to compare the opaque, lethargic, chaotic state of mind which in respectable society so securely passes for sanity, with the pure electric light, the cloudless clearness, of Poe's intelligence in its

[1] Mr. Howells, it may be remembered, has followed Mr. James in speaking slightingly of Poe; and, indeed, the general current of American criticism is still in that direction. In face of these judgments, which dispose not only of performance but of calibre, one is driven to wonder how the writers estimate their own total powers, as against Poe's.

normal state; and to reflect that he has been called mad, and is sometimes described as a charlatan. How would his detractors, for instance, have compared with Poe in thinking power if they had had to deal with such a problem as that of the *prima facie* credibility of the "Moon Hoax," which Poe is falsely accused of imitating? The Moon Hoax was a celebrated narrative, the work of Mr. Richard Adams Locke, which appeared in the *New York Sun* some three weeks *after* Poe's *Hans Pfaall* had been published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, and which made a great sensation at the time. The *Moon Story* gravely professed to describe the inhabitants, animals, vegetation, and scenery of the moon, as having been lately made out by Sir John Herschel with a new telescope; while Poe gave a minute narrative, touched at points with banter, of a balloon journey to the same orb; but there was little detailed resemblance in the narratives, and Poe accepted Mr. Locke's declaration that he had not seen the *Adventure* when he concocted his hoax. The point of interest for us here is that the hoax was very widely successful; and that Poe found it worth while afterwards to show in detail how obvious was the imposition, and how easily it should have been seen through by intelligent readers. "Not one person in ten," he records, "discredited it, and the doubters were chiefly those who doubted without being able to say why — the ignorant, those uninformed in astronomy — people who *would not* believe because the thing was so novel, so entirely 'out of the usual way.' A grave professor of mathematics in a Virginian college told me seriously that he had *no doubt* of the truth of the whole affair!" Accordingly, Poe appended to his *Hans Pfaall* story, on republishing it, an analysis of the other story, than which there could not be a more luminous exercise of psychological logic. His scientific and other knowledge, and his power of scrutiny, enabled him to detect a dozen blunders and clumsinesses; but perhaps the most characteristic touch is his remark on the entire absence from the narrative of any expression of surprise at a phenomenon which, on the assumptions made, must have been part of the discoverer's vision — namely, the curious appearance presented by the moon's alleged inhabitants, in that their heads would be towards the terrestrial gazer, and that they would appear to hang to the moon by their feet. The demand for an expression of astonishment at this was that of an intelligence which had carried the action of imagination to a high pitch of methodic perfection. The pro-

cesses of sub-conscious inference which initiate conviction, the polarity of average thinking, the elements of evidence, all had been pondered and perceived by Poe with an acumen that is as singular as most forms of genius. And the result of the demonstration was no mere protraction of subtle introspection, but the masterly solution of an abstruse concrete problem. His facility in the explication of cypher-writing was astounding: witness his triumph over all challengers when he dealt with the subject in a Philadelphia journal and in *Graham's Magazine;* his unravelling of a cryptograph in which were employed seven alphabets, without intervals between the words or even between the lines; and his crowning conquest of a cypher so elaborate that no outsider succeeded in solving it *with the key* when Poe offered a reward as an inducement. Take, again, the essay on "Maelzel's Chess Player," in which he bends his mind on the question whether that was or was not an automaton; examines with an eye like a microscope the features of the object; passes in review previous attempts at explanation; and evolves with rigorous logic an irresistible demonstration that the machine was worked by a man, and of the manner of the working. The power to work such a demonstration is as rare, as remarkable, as almost any species of faculty that can be named. It is sanity raised to a higher power. Such performances, to say nothing of his prediction of the plot of *Barnaby Rudge* from the opening chapters, should give pause to those who incline to the view, indorsed by some respectable critics, that there was nothing extraordinary in Poe's feats of analytic fiction, seeing that he himself tied the knots he untied. But that criticism is invalid on the face of it. Why is Poe so unrivalled in his peculiar line if it is so easy to tie and untie complex knots of incident, and to forge chains of causation in narrative? Does any one ever dream of denying skill in plot-construction to Scribe and Sardou because they deliberately lead up to their *dénouements?* Is it the tyro who propounds deep problems in chess, or the schoolboy who imagines new theorems in geometry? The matter is hardly worth discussing. That the author of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Adventure of Hans Pfaall*, and *The Mystery of Marie Roget* could be a mere intellectual charlatan, differing only from his fellows in power of make-believe, is what De Quincey would call a "fierce impossibility."

As a narrator and as a thinker Poe has half a dozen excellences any one of which would entitle him to fame. The general mind

of Europe has been fascinated by his tales; but how far has it realized the quality of the work in them? It has for the most part read Poe as it has read Alexandre Dumas. Poe, indeed, wrote to interest the reading public, and he was far too capable an artist not to manage what he wanted; but it was not in his nature to produce work merely adequate to the popular demand. Hundreds of popular stories are produced and are forgotten, for the plain reason that while the writer has somehow succeeded in interesting a number of his contemporaries, his work lacks the intellectual salt necessary for its preservation to future times. Posterity reads it and finds nothing to respect; neither mastery of style nor subtlety nor closeness of thought. But Poe's best stories have a quality of pure mind, an intensity of intelligized imagination, that seems likely to impress men centuries hence as much as it did his more competent readers in his own day. Even at the present moment, when his *genre* is almost entirely uncultivated, such a hard-headed critic as Professor Minto sums up that "there are few English writers of this century whose fame is likely to be more enduring. The feelings to which he appeals are simple but universal, and he appeals to them with a force that has never been surpassed." To that generously just verdict I am disposed, however, to offer a partial demurrer, in the shape of a suggestion that it is not so much in the universality of the "feelings" to which he appeals as in the manifest and consummate faculty with which he is seen to frame his appeal, that Poe's security of renown really lies. Doubtless many readers will, as hitherto, see the narrative and that only; just as Poe himself points out that "not one person in ten — nay, not one person in five hundred — has, during the perusal of *Robinson Crusoe*, the most remote conception that any particle of genius, or even of common talent, has been employed in its creation. Men do not look upon it in the light of a literary performance." But one fancies that the age of critical reading is evolving, in which, notwithstanding a random saying of Poe's own to the contrary, men will combine delight in the artist's skill with due susceptibility to the result.

Even among those who perceive the immense importance of naturalism in fiction, there are, it is to be feared, some who are so narrow as to see no value in any work of which the naturalism is not that species of absolute realism that, selection apart, is substantially contended for by M. Zola, and is variously exempli-

fied in his and other modern novels of different countries and correspondingly different flavours. Now, the effective vindication of Poe, to my mind, is that, weird and *bizarre* and abnormal as are the themes he affected, he is essentially a realist in his method. Granted that he turns away from experience, ordinary or otherwise, for his subjects, what could be more perfect than the circumspection with which he uses every device of arrangement and tone, of omission and suggestion, to give his fiction the air of actuality? Take his *Hans Pfaall*. Hardly any critic, save Dr. Landa in his preface to his Spanish translation of some of the tales, has done justice to the exactitude and verisimilitude with which Poe has there touched in his astronomical, physical, and physiological details; and employed them to the point of carrying illusion to its possible limit even while he has artistically guarded himself from the downright pretence by the fantastic fashion of his introduction. There is realism and realism. It was Poe's idiosyncrasy as a fictionist to examine, not the interplay of the primary human and social emotions either in the open or in half lights, not to be either a Thackeray or a Hawthorne, but to trace the sequences and action of the thinking faculty in its relation to the leading instincts and feelings of the individual; and this he does partly by studying himself and partly by comparing himself with others — precisely the method of ordinary humanist fiction. He is always an observer in this direction. His objection to the "Moon Hoax" was that it not merely showed ignorant blundering in its details but was wanting in proper calculation of the attitude of good observers; so in his paper on "Maelzel's Chess Player" he unhesitatingly rejects one of Brewster's explanations as assuming too commonplace a stratagem; so, in easily unravelling a friend's cypher, he laughs at the "shallow artifice" he sees in it; and so in his Parisian stories he derides, in the police officer, the cunning which he finds so inferior to true sagacity.

Even the story of *The Black Cat* is realistic — realistic in the very wildness of its action. Any one in reading Poe can see how he consciously constructed tales by letting his creative faculty follow the line of one of those morbid fancies that probably in some degree occur at times to all of us, and of which, alas! he must have had a tremendous share; giving the recapitulation a gruesome lifelikeness by vigilant embodiment of the details he had noted in following the track of the sinister caprice. And so *The*

Tell-Tale Heart, and *William Wilson*, and *The Cask of Amontillado* are realistic — realistic in the sense that they have had a psychologic basis in the perversities of a disturbed imagination: hence the uncanny fascination of these and other stories of his in a similar taste.[1] Whether that particular species of fiction will retain a hold on men is a matter on which it would be rash to prophesy; and indeed it may be that not only this but another class of Poe's productions — that which includes *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Ligeia*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, *The Assignation*, and *Berenice* — may, as mankind progresses in rational culture, lose that peculiar impressiveness they have for so many readers to-day. These strange creations, whelmed in shade, seem to belong to some wild region, out of the main road of human evolution. To my own taste, I confess, they are less decisively and permanently impressive than such feats of daylight imagination, so to speak, as *Arthur Gordon Pym*, *Hans Pfaall*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, or even *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *The Purloined Letter;* but there is no overlooking the element of power, the intension of idea, which makes itself felt in the twilight studies as in the others. Like every man who has to live by steady pen-work, Poe produced some inferior stuff and some downright trash; but wherever his faculty comes at all fully into play it puts a unique stamp of intellect on its product, a stamp not consisting in mere force of beauty or style, though these are involved, but in a steady, unfaltering pressure of the writer's thought on the attention of his reader. And when we recognize this pregnancy and intensity, and take note that such a critic as Mr. Lowell was so impressed by the "serene and sombre beauty" of *The Fall of the House of Usher* as to pronounce it sufficient by itself to prove Poe a man of genius and the master of a classic style, we shall see cause to doubt whether any considerable portion of Poe's imaginative work belongs to the perishable order of literature.

As for the group of tales of the saner type, with their blazing vividness and tense compactness of substance — beyond insisting on the importance of the capacity implied in these results, and the essential realism of the stories within the limits of their species, there can be little need to claim for them either attention or praise.

[1] See the *Saturday Review* of November 28, 1885, for a well-expressed criticism to the same effect, published a few weeks after the foregoing, but doubtless by a writer who had never seen that. Cp. Hennequin, *Écrivains Francisés*, pp. 120–130.

Their fascination as narratives is felt by all: the only drawback is the tendency to argue that, because the non-realistic novel is potentially inferior to the realistic, this class of story is inferior to the realistic novel or story of ordinary life. To reason so is to confuse types. Lytton is a worse novelist than Thackeray because, professing both explicitly and implicitly to portray character and society, he is less true in every respect; and the idealistic element in George Eliot is of less value than her work of observation because it claims acceptance on the same footing while its title is, in the terms of the case, awanting. Here we are dealing with comparable things, with performances to be judged in relation to each other. But in Poe we deal with quite a different species of art. That familiar objection to his tales on the score of their lack of human or moral colour, expressed by Mr. Lowell, in his *Fable for Critics*, in the phrase "somehow the heart seems squeezed out by the mind," is the extension of the confusion into downright injustice. It lies on the face of his work that Poe never aims at reproducing every-day life and society, with its multitude of minute character-phenomena forming wholes for artistic contemplation, but — to put it formally — at working out certain applications and phases of the faculties of reflection and volition, as conditioning and conditioned by abnormal tendencies and incidents. He does not seek or profess to draw "character" in the sense in which Dickens or Balzac does; he has almost nothing to do with local colour or sub-divisions of type; his fisherman in *The Descent into the Maelstrom* is an unspecialized intelligent person; Arthur Gordon Pym similarly is simply an observing, reasoning, and energizing individual who goes through and notes certain experiences: in short, these personages are abstractions of one aspect of Poe.[1] On the other hand, Usher and the speakers in *The Black Cat* and *The Imp of the Perverse* merely represent a reversal of the formula; peculiar idiosyncrasy in their case being made the basis of incident, whereas in the others pure incident or mystery was made the motive. No matter which element predominates, normal character study is excluded; Poe's bias, as we said, being toward analysis or synthesis of processes of applied reason and psychal idiosyncrasy, not to reproduction of the light and shade of life pitched on the

[1] The unfinished *Journal of Julius Rodman* (published in Mr. Ingram's *edition de luxe* of the tales and poems) presents us with a somewhat more individualized type, but there too the interest centres in the incidents.

everyday plane. It was not that he was without eye for that. On the contrary, his criticisms show he had a sound taste in the novel proper; and we find him rather critically alert than otherwise in his social relation to the personalities about him. It was that his artistic bent lay in another direction.

As a tale-teller, then, he is to be summed up as having worked in his special line with the same extraordinary creative energy and intellectual mastery as distinguish his verse; giving us narratives "of imagination all compact," yet instinct with life in every detail and particle, no matter how strange, how aloof from common things, may be the theme. As Dr. Landa remarks, he has been the first story-writer to exploit the field of science in the department of the marvellous; and he has further been the first to exploit the marvellous in morbid psychology with scientific art. These are achievements as commanding, as significant of genius, as the most distinguished success in any of the commoner walks of fiction; and a contrary view is reasonably to be described as a fanatical development of an artistic doctrine perfectly sound and of vital importance in its right application, but liable, like other cults, to incur reaction when carried to extremes. After *The Idiot Boy* and *The Prelude* came *The Lady of Shalott* and the *Idylls of the King;* after Trollope came King Romance again; and even if Poe were eclipsed for a time, posterity would still be to reckon with.

IV

There is still to be considered, if we would measure Poe completely, his work in the fields of abstract æsthetics, criticism, and philosophy; and to some of us that aspect of him is not less remarkable than his artistic expression of himself in verse and fiction. Even among his admirers, however, this is not the prevailing attitude. Thus Mr. Ingram, to whose untiring and devoted labour is mainly due the vindication of Poe's memory, considers that criticism was "hardly his forte"; and Dr. William Hand Browne, who, in his article in the Baltimore *New Eclectic Magazine* on "Poe's *Eureka* and Recent Scientific Speculations," has been the first bearer of testimony to the poet's capacity as a thinker — even this independent eulogist thinks it necessary to declare that in Poe's *Rationale of Verse*, "in connection with just and original remarks on English versification, of which he was a

master, we find a tissue of the merest absurdity about the classical measures, of which he knew nothing." I cannot agree to the implications of Mr. Ingram's phrase, and I cannot but think that Dr. Browne has spoken recklessly as to Poe's knowledge and criticism of the so-called "classical measures," treating that question very much as other critics have treated the *Eureka*. That Poe in his school days was a good Latinist we know from one of his schoolfellows, who dwells especially on the delight with which he used to listen to Poe's conning of his favourite pieces in Horace.

The school in question was strong on the Latin side, and it is hardly possible that Poe, whatever he might do in Greek, could be otherwise than familiar with the orthodox scansions of the classic poets, ranking, as he did, as joint dux of the school.[1] In point of fact, he won distinctions in both Latin and French at the University of Virginia, which must surely count for something.

It requires, indeed, little scholarship to gather from the ordinary editions the received metres of Horace and the established scansions of the hexameter, which are what Poe puts in evidence in so far as he challenges the academic theory of classic verse. These are given with strict accuracy. The whole question raised is whether they stand by a scientific or by a merely traditional authority; and it is surely a device worthy of a mediæval schoolman to evade the inquiry by a sweeping charge of ignorance.[2]

In just this supercilious fashion have avowedly unfriendly critics

[1] That Poe's general culture was wide and effective it seems unnecessary to contend here, though some of his critics deny him such credit. His works must speak for themselves. It has indeed been pointed out by one critic that the nature of his reference to Gresset's *Ver-Vert*, in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, shows him to have used the title without knowing the poem; and Mrs. Whitman's merely forensic rejoinder only shows that she had not read it either. I fancy he may have dipped into the poem and noticed such a phrase as "le saint oiseau" or the concluding lines, and so entirely missed the nature of the narrative. His "stately raven of the saintly days of yore" suggests the same chance. But one such miscarriage, whatever be the explanation, cannot destroy the general testimony of his so various writings.

[2] The late Sidney Lanier wrote that "the trouble with Poe was, he did not *know* enough. He needed to know a good many more things in order to be a great poet." Alas, that is the trouble with all of us, small and great; and in more ways than one, in the subtler sense rather than in the simpler, it holds true of Lanier himself, to the point of the statement that he fell ever further short of being a great poet in the ratio of the growth of his conviction that he was one, and that his poetry was an expression of knowledge. Man of genius as he was, he did not finally succeed even in fulfilling his own law of severance between Art and Cleverness. Poe remains the greater poet because he *knew* better the function of poetry and its relation to truth.

disparaged Poe on other grounds, passing judgment without offering a jot of evidence. One is led to suspect that, while thinking for himself on science, Dr. Browne treated questions of classic metre with the unquestioning faith which other people give to the propositions of religion. Those who have looked with independent interest into the dogmas of classic prosody know that, whether right or wrong, Poe was dealing with a subject on which even reputedly "orthodox" opinion is hopelessly confused; and that the off-hand language of Dr. Browne pretends a certainty of expert authority which does not exist. Certain rules for scanning Greek and Latin verse pass current; but save in respect of nominal adherence to the arbitrary rules of a given text-book, there is no agreement among scholars; and it is safe to say that the traditional lore of the schools is a mass of uncomprehended shibboleths, framed without understanding and accepted on the same basis. Poe must have heard at school and university the ordinary directions for the scanning of classic verse. He was singular enough to think them out for his own satisfaction, and he thus found there was no satisfaction to be had from them.

What Poe urged on that head is, I venture to think, broadly just and well-timed. As he truly said, "there is something in 'scholarship' which seduces us into blind worship of Bacon's *Idol of the Theatre* — into irrational deference to antiquity;" [1] and as a matter of fact the prosody of the schools had never any better basis than one of Talmudic deduction from verse never scientifically studied. The *Iliad*, as Poe again says, "being taken as a starting-point, was made to stand instead of Nature and common sense. Upon this poem, in place of facts and deduction from fact, or from natural law, were built systems of feet, metres, rhythms, rules — rules that contradict each other every five minutes, and for nearly all of which there may be found nearly twice as many exceptions as examples." The notorious want of hearty enjoyment of ancient verse, *quâ* verse, among those who study it, and the naked and unashamed unnaturalness of our own enunciation of it, are sufficient to support Poe's protest against any mere dogmatic retort from the pedants; and I apprehend that no open-minded reader of his essay will have any difficulty in deciding whether the analytic poet or the ordinary scholastic is the better fitted to arrive at what

[1] In this connection note the recent challenge to the traditionist grammarians by Mr. Gavin Hamilton in his treatise on the Subjunctive. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1889.

the principles of rhythm really are. Poe seems to have had the eccentric taste to try to enjoy his Horace as he enjoyed his Tennyson. But to say this is to say that he undertook an almost hopelessly difficult task, and it would be going too far to say that he has succeeded as he thought he did. A full examination of the matter must be left to an appendix; but it may here be said that in the very act of coming to the conclusion that Poe's simplified system of feet in turn breaks down like the old and complex one as an anatomy of verse, we are led to acknowledge anew the singular originality and energy of his mind. It is no extravagance to say that in this matter it is better to err with Poe than to be "right" with Dr. Browne, for Poe's error is a brilliant effort to make a new system out of the wreck of one which he has rightly discarded, and he offers vivid argumentative exposition where academic orthodoxy offers inert and unreasoned rules. In every respect save the crowning point of scientific rightness it is a masterly critical performance.[1]

V

The close of the *Rationale* raises a question which has been generally decided against Poe — that as to whether he had any humour. Humour of the kind in which American literature is specially rich he clearly had not. Such attempts as his *X-ing a Paragrab* have none of the hilarious fun of those grotesque exaggerations which form one of the two main features of American humour; and of its other constituent of subtle, kindly drollery, unembittered jesting at the incongruous in morals or in incidents, he can offer us almost as little. The explanation is that in respect of temperament he was too unhappily related to American society to have any cordial satisfaction in studying it; and that his sense of the comic had the warmthlessness and colourlessness of unmitigated reason. One sometimes finds him even pungently

[1] Mr. Stedman, in editing the recent complete edition of Poe's works, has seen fit to say that "the *Rationale of Verse* is a curious discussion of mechanics now well enough understood" (Introd. to Vol. VI., p. xiv). As very few of us are conscious of Mr. Stedman's sense of mastery, which he does not give us the means of sharing, I leave my Appendix on *Accent, Quantity, and Feet* to exhibit other people's difficulties. And when Mr. Stedman further pronounces (p. xv) that "one can rarely draw a better contrast between the faulty and the masterly treatment of a literary topic than by citing *The Rationale of Verse* and [Arnold's] three lectures *On Translating Homer*," I must take leave to say that he does but give us an uncritical indorsement of a prestige. Arnold's book is really a failure as a technical treatise.

humorous, but it is always in a generalization, or in derision of a fallacy or a fatuity; always in a flash of the reason, never in a twinkle of the temperament; and only those who are capable of what George Eliot once delightedly spoke of as the laughter which comes of a satisfaction of the understanding, will perceive that he possesses humour at all. His satire, indeed, is strictly in keeping with his criticism in general. The peculiar quality of that, which for some readers makes it unsuccessful, lies in this absolute supremacy of judgment. The apparent or rather the virtual ruthlessness of much of his critical writing is the outcome of the two facts that he had an extremely keen critical sense and that, in applying it, save when his emotional side was stimulated, as it generally was when he was criticising women,[1] he was sheer, implacable intellect. To him the discrimination of good and bad in literature was a matter of the intensest seriousness: of the faculty for doing mere "notices" of the mechanically inept and insincere sort turned out by so many of the criticasters who moralize about his lack of the moral sense — of that convenient aptitude he was quite destitute. To represent him, however, in the way Mr. Stoddard does, as a kind of literary Red Indian, delighting in the use of the tomahawk for its own sake, is but to add to the darkening of critical counsel about Poe. The prejudiced critic in question speaks as follows: —

"Like Iago, he was nothing if not critical, and the motto of his self-sufficient spirit was *Nil admirari*. . . . It is a weakness incident to youth and ambition. . . . I do not think that Poe ever outgrew it, or sought to outgrow it. He believed that his readers loved havoc; Mr. Burton, on the contrary, believed that they loved justice. And he was right, as the criticisms of Poe have proved, for they have failed to commend themselves to the good sense of his countrymen. His narrow but acute mind enabled him to detect the verbal faults of those whom he criticised, but it disqualified him from perceiving their mental qualities. He mastered the letter, but the spirit escaped him. He advanced no critical principle which he established; he attacked no critical principle which he overthrew. He broke a few butterflies on his wheel; but he destroyed no reputation. He was a powerless iconoclast." [2]

I quote this as the most close-packed, comprehensive, and consistent piece of aggressively bad criticism by a not incompetent

[1] See Mr. Stoddard's memoir in Widdleton's edition of Poe, p. 165. "I cannot point an arrow against any woman," was one of Poe's private avowals. Still, he wrote contemptuously of Margaret Fuller, whom he disliked on both personal and literary grounds, as did Mr. Lowell.

[2] Memoir in Widdleton's ed., p. 89.

critic that I remember to have seen. From the malicious, not to say malignant, "Like Iago" to the overstrained depreciation of the "powerless iconoclast," all is unfair and untrue. The remark about "havoc" and Mr. Burton refers to a jesting answer made by Mr. Poe to one of his employers who deprecated his severity; an answer which to take as an expression of Poe's critical creed is discreditably unjust. He thought the severity complained of was deserved, and he merely made the light answer by way of soothing the uneasiness or silencing the objections of an employer for whose judgment he had no respect. To take seriously a phrase so uttered is to show either moral pedantry or prejudice. As to the view taken of Poe as a critic by the "good sense" of his countrymen, that must be left to the decision of the tribunal in question, if it can be got at; and the proposition that Poe's mind was narrow may be profitably left alone; while the other dicta may be best disposed of by laying down truer ones.

What may fairly be said against Poe's criticisms is that they have not the absolute artistic balance and completeness, the perfection of "form" which belongs to his tales and best poems. Criticism was not with him, as it has been said to be with Mr. Lowell and Mr. Arnold, a "fine art"; it was rather a science; and his critiques accordingly are processes of scientific analysis and summing-up, almost always restricted in a businesslike manner to the subject in hand. What he might have done if he had had the opportunities of the two writers named, if he had had academic leisure and good media, is a matter for speculation; but what we do know is that he has left a body of widely various criticism which, as such, will better stand critical examination to-day than any similar work produced in England or America in his time. Mr. James, half-sharing the normal American hostility to Poe, thinks that his critical product "is probably the most complete specimen of *provincialism* ever prepared for the edification of men"; though he admits that there is mixed in it a great deal of sense and discrimination; and that "here and there, sometimes at frequent intervals (*sic*), we find a phrase of happy insight embedded in a patch of the most fatuous pedantry."[1] Well, provincialism is a very incalculable thing: so Protean and subtle that some people find some of the essence of it actually in the very full-blown cosmopolitanism of Mr. James, whose delicate narrative art is so much occupied with the delineation of aspects of the life of idle Americans in Europe and idle

[1] *Hawthorne*, p. 64.

Europeans in America, and so admirably detached from all grosser things. Putting that out of the question, and assuming that Mr. James is as qualified a critic of criticism in general as he has undoubtedly proved himself to be of the novel, we must in any case hold that he did not sufficiently consider the general conditions of criticism in Poe's day when he penned his aspersion. When we remember how matters stood in England, with Christopher North and the youthful Thackeray and Macaulay and the Quarterlies representing the critical spirit;[1] when we note how Carlyle, studying *Blackwood* and *Frazer* in those days, decides that "the grand requisite seems to be impudence, and a fearless committing of yourself to talk in your drink"; and when we try to reckon up what of insight and real breadth of view there was in all these, we shall find it difficult to accept Mr. James's standard. Provincialism is a matter of comparison. If it be decided that to deal as minutely as Poe did with the contemporary literature and writers of one's own country is unwise, the provincialism of the proceeding will still be to prove; and in the end a number of things in Poe's critical remains go some way to explode the detractions we have been considering. Particular judgments apart, there is a general pressure of reasoning power in his critical writing which is really not to be found in the works of later men, English and American, whose title is taken for granted by some of those who make light of Poe on this side. The reasoning of Mr. Lowell, outside of the field of pure literature or literary art, is always precarious and not seldom quite puerile: that of Mr. Arnold, even on points of literary effect, is too often trivially and cheaply fallacious; but in Poe, though we may find critical caprice and extravagance, the standard of ratiocination, the ruling quality of the logic, is always high and masculine. And against a few extravagances of praise and dispraise, there are a hundred sure and true verdicts, given long in advance of general appreciation. When we look to see what line he takes as a critic, we find him delightedly extolling Tennyson as a great poet when men were still worshipping devoutly at the shrine of Wordsworth; insisting from the first that the obscure Hawthorne was a genius of a far higher order than Longfellow; welcoming Dickens as a great artist in the humours of character, but warning him that he had no gift of construction; heartily eulogizing Hood;

[1] "Macaulay and Dilke and one or two others excepted," writes Poe (*Marginalia*, vii.), "there is not in Great Britain a critic who can fairly be considered worthy the name."

giving generous praise to Mr. Horne's *Orion;* denying merit to the popular Lever; pointing out that the still more popular *Valentine Vox* was not literature; standing up for fair play to Moore; keenly scrutinizing Macaulay; doing homage to Mrs. Browning; paying the fullest admiring tribute to the memory of Lamb; coolly and impartially analyzing Cooper — always quick to give honour where honour was due, and to protest against critical injustice; never once pandering to commercialism or tolerating the puffery of the undeserving; never weighting his scales for the benefit of any, save perhaps when his idiosyncrasy made him exaggerate the merits of some women-poets. As for the pedantry, one may suggest that there are departments of criticism to which Mr. James, admirable critic as he is, may be a stranger; and that it is yet not pedantry to be at home in these.

Let us glose nothing: let us admit that in discussing the commonplace quality of Lever, Poe becomes so extravagant in his esteem of the kind of fiction to which his own faculty pointed as to say that "for one Fouqué there are fifty Molières," and to declare that "Mr. Dickens has no more business with the rabble than a seraph with a *chapeau de bras* " — here stultifying a previous utterance. There is nothing to be said for such deliration as that, of course: we can but set it down to the brain-flaw. Nor can it be denied that the temper of his writing is often faulty; that he shows "bad form" enough to justify M. Hennequin's use of the word "littlenesses." The note, in fact, is often sharply neurotic. But at the risk of being charged with neck-or-nothing partisanship, I venture hereanent to indorse the phrase of the friendly reviewer who pronounced Poe "potentially" one of the greatest of critics. It is a perfectly fair distinction. One finds that Poe's critical judgment was generally unerring; and that he invariably knew and told how and why he reached his verdict; and one finds in an utterly preposterous misjudgment on his part only a sign of momentary distraction. For the comparative bareness of the critical part of his work is no argument against his being a great critic. Indeed the very faults that are most flagrant in his critical work, the stress of temper over small matters and small writers, and the pedantic-looking persistence in theoretic analysis, clearly come of the spontaneous play of his critical faculty through the medium of a flawed nervous system, without check from the other faculties of character. Hence the air of "littleness," even of moral defect. It was not that, as the wiseacres said, he was without character;

but that in him certain intellectual faculties were so developed as to go to work without control from the character, at least in his excited moods. And it was his hard fate that, as a hack journalist, he had to write in all moods, and on matters of journalistic attraction — a simple economic fact which is strangely disregarded by his gainsayers.[1] When he was not nervously excited, again, the very strength of his critical faculty tended to make him pronounce rigorously technical and unadorned decisions where other men would turn out polished and charming essays; but in the terms of the case his work is more truly critical than theirs. The truth is that in our literature pure criticism is very scarce. Some of our most popular and charming critics, so-called, are rather essayists than methodical judges of literature: they write *à propos* of books and authors, giving us in so doing a finished expression of their own sentiments and their own philosophy, often laying down sound literary opinions and displaying a fine taste; but leaving us rather to echo their conclusions out of esteem for their authority than guiding us to any science of discrimination on our own account. Writing as critics, they are adding to literature rather than effectively analyzing it. With Poe it is altogether different. We read his criticisms not for their own literary quality but for their judicial value and their service to critical science; and though it follows that they can never be widely known, it is not unsafe to predict for them recognition and interest at a time when a great deal of the more "readable" products of modern critics are forgotten. Certainly Poe was in advance of his time in the rigour of his critical principles. The unrealized ambition of his literary life, the foundation of a critical journal which should be absolutely honest and be written by none but competent critics, giving the reasons for all their judgments, was utterly utopian. Neither the required critics nor fit readers then existed or yet exist in America, or for that matter in England. Now, as in Poe's day, it may be that the qualified craftsmen in the States have to waste their strength in miscellaneity; but however that may be it is certain that American criticism, like English, makes but a poor show beside the critical

[1] We have his own anxious avowal in his masterly critique of *Barnaby Rudge:* "From what we have here said, and perhaps said without due deliberation (for, alas! the hurried duties of the journalist preclude it). . . ." The same explanation will account for the inconsistencies of phrase in the critique on Hawthorne. And some of the worst exhibitions in the *Broadway Journal* are to be set down to the fact, noted by Mr. Ingram, that Poe had at times to manufacture most of the matter for an issue, this when his physique was rapidly running down.

literature of France. For illustration, it must suffice here to suggest a comparison of the graceful and genial essay of Mr. Stedman, the best American estimate of Poe, with the article by M. Emile Hennequin in the *Revue Contemporaine;*[1] an analytical study which, reading it as I do when my own essay is as good as written, makes me feel as if my labour were mostly thrown away. M. Hennequin, perhaps, would not resent[2] the inference that he has learned some lessons of analysis from Poe; who, by the way, performed as remarkable a feat of analysis in his criticism of *Barnaby Rudge* as in any of his other productions. The decomposition of that story, the revelation of the writer's mental processes, and the deduction of the plot from the opening chapters, drawing as they did from Dickens an inquiry whether his critic had dealings with the devil, are things to be remembered in the history of literature. But if there were no such achievement to Poe's credit, and if he had not written his essay on the American Drama, one of the ablest dramatic criticisms ever penned, that body of multifold criticism which stands in his works under the title *Marginalia* would alone suffice, to my thinking, to prove him a born critic. Barring some follies, some pretentiousness, some intended nonsense, and some inexplicable contradictions, which suggest either deliberate mystification or mixed authorship, that miscellany of paragraphs and essaylets is a perpetual sparkle of clear thought, into which one dives time after time, always finding stimulus, even if it be of provocation, always buoyantly upborne by the masterful mind.

But while we find Poe even in his college days making curious attempts to "divide his mind" by doing two things at once, and in later life musing intently on "the power of words," his thinking faculty was not limited to analysis and criticism. It so happens that he has given us, in addition to all his artistic and critical work, one of the most extraordinary productions of imaginative philosophic synthesis in literature. The *Eureka* has, indeed, no sociological bearing, save in so far as it incidentally throws out the suggestion that as "the importance of the development of the terrestrial vitality proceeds equally with the terrestrial condensation," we may surmise the stages of the evolution of life to be in terms of the variations of the solar influence on the earth, and that the discharge of a new planet, inferior to Mercury, might freshly modify the terrestrial surface so as to produce "a race both materially and

[1] January, 1885; reprinted in the volume *Écrivains Francisés.*
[2] M. Hennequin, alas! died suddenly in the summer of 1888, in his prime.

spiritually superior to Man." The speculation is interesting, but remote from everyday interests. A remarkable detail in Poe's life and character is that he rarely touches on things political; whence, perhaps, an impression that he had no sympathy with social movement and aspiration in general. On the strength, presumably, of the allusion to mob rule in *Some Words with a Mummy*, and of some sentences in the *Colloquy of Monos and Una*, Mr. Lang [1] confusedly decides that "If democratic ecstasies are a tissue of historical errors and self-complacent content with the commonplace, no one saw that more clearly than Poe." But the school of languid anti-democrats cannot rightfully claim Poe as being on their side. If they will read chap. vii. of the *Marginalia* they will find him expressing democratic sentiments in his own person; and in his *Fifty Suggestions* (not a very satisfactory compilation) they will find a remarkable prophetic judgment as to the revolutionary spirit in Europe. If further proof is wanted of Poe's essential democratism, I would cite the circumstance, not generally known, that in the *Broadway Journal* there appeared, while he was sole editor, an article entitled "Art Singing and Heart Singing," signed "Walter Whitman," in which are suggested for apparently the first time those doctrines as to democratic culture which have since become so familiar; and that there is the editorial note "It is scarcely necessary to add that we agree with our correspondent throughout." The fact remains, however, that Poe made no attempt at a sociological synthesis. Setting aside the constructive element in his tales, it is in his cosmogonic philosophy that we must look for the synthetic side of his mind.

VI

It resulted from the insistence of the "reasoning reason" in Poe that the train of thought which evolved the *Eureka* found expression also in his artistic work, while at the same time the growing insurgence of temperament gave an emotional cast to his philosophy. To say nothing of his psychological tales, we have the *Colloquy of Monos and Una* (as to the alleged plagiarizing in which there is not a shadow of evidence) where two souls in heaven look back on the finished course of humanity; the *Conversation of Eiros and Charmian*, in which similarly one spirit tells another of how

[1] In the preface to the "Parchment" edition of Poe's poems.

the race was destroyed; and *The Power of Words*, in which yet again two immortals talk of transcendental things. In this last dialogue there is a touch which for vastitude of imagination is perhaps unmatchable. "Come," says the spirit Agathos to Oinos, who is "new-fledged with immortality" — "Come! we will leave to the left the loud harmony of the Pleiades, and sweep outward from the throne into the starry meadows beyond Orion, where, for pansies and violets and heart's-ease, are the beds of the triplicate and triple-tinted suns." In the way of "brave translunary things" it will not be easy to beat that. This is indeed *poiesis;* and it was perhaps with a true instinct that Poe, flatly contradicting his own rule that a poem must be short to be truly poetic, recorded his desire that the *Eureka*, with all its logic and criticism, should be regarded as a poem. It is a great, impassioned, imaginative projection, beginning in just some such elemental swell of ideal emotion as gives birth to poetry. But there could be no greater mistake than to regard the *Eureka*, with its vast cosmogonic sweep, as a mere rhapsody. Dr. William Hand Browne, who has made it the subject of a sufficiently practical article, finds that its author possessed, "in remarkable excellence, the scientific mind." [1] Recognizing this, Dr. Browne remarks that it has been Poe's peculiarly hard fortune to be not only persistently maligned by his enemies but imperfectly estimated by his friends; a truth which Dr. Browne goes on unconsciously to illustrate by denying Poe credit for *The Gold Bug* and *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and, as we have seen, by charging him with writing absurdly and ignorantly on the classical measures. These injustices, however, perhaps give only the more weight to Dr. Browne's eulogy when he attributes to Poe "the power of expressing his thoughts, however involved, subtle, or profound, with such precision, such lucidity, and withal with such simplicity of style, that we hardly know where to look for his equal: certainly nowhere among American writers." That seems to me quite true; and there could be no better evidence in support than the *Eureka*, which only needs to be separately reprinted without its worrying dashes and without italics to rank as the most luminous and the most original theistic treatise in the language. This verdict may perhaps incur the more suspicion

[1] It is one of the mistakes of Dr. Nordau to exclaim vociferously at M. Morice for naming Poe in the same group with Spencer and Claude Bernard (*Dégénéresence* French trans. i. 242). Dr. Nordau evidently knows very little about Poe's performance.

when I avow that I pass it in the conviction that Poe's reasoning breaks down, like all other theistic reasoning, when its conclusion is applied to the primary problem. It is the way in which he reasons up to a conclusion subversive of itself and of all other theisms, that makes this treatise unique in philosophy. It is plain, indeed, that Poe on his way reasoned himself out of his primary theism into an entirely new poly-pantheism; and of course it is a plain proof of mental disturbance thus to wander on the path of an inquiry.[1] But let the mental overpoise be taken for granted, and the intellectual interest of the performance remains.

At the outset he decides with the most absolute arbitrariness that there is a finite "universe of stars," and an infinite "universe of space" — a proposition which certainly testifies to his failure to get behind the common illusion of space as the antithesis of existence. No less arbitrarily does he assume Deity, making none of the popular pretences to reach that hypothesis by way of elimination. "As our starting-point, then," he writes, "let us adopt the Godhead. Of this Godhead in itself, he alone is not imbecile, he alone is not impious, who propounds — nothing."[2] But, following the familiar, the fatal path of all theology, he will not admit that the inconceivable will be forever unconceived, and, having to begin with affirmed its volition, he immediately after affirms that he has something else to propound concerning it: —

"An intuition altogether irresistible, although inexpressible, forces me to the conclusion that what God originally created — that that Matter, which, by dint of his Volition, he first made from his spirit, or from Nihility (!) *could* have been nothing but matter in its utmost conceivable state of — what? — of *Simplicity*. This will be found the sole absolute *assumption* of my Discourse."[3]

In other words, "*Oneness* is all that I predicate of the originally created Matter." But "the assumption of absolute Unity in the primordial Particle includes that of infinite divisibility," so that we yet further assume attraction and repulsion as primal characteristics of the universe, the first being its material and the second its spiritual principle.[4] "I feel, in a word, that here the God has interposed, and here only, because here and here only the knot

[1] It would seem indeed that only in his last years did he begin to pay much attention to religious problems. His previous attitude seems to have been conventionally, sometimes even vulgarly, orthodox — a surprising thing in the case of such a critical intelligence.

[2] *Works*, Ingram's ed., III. 107.

[3] P. 108.

[4] P. 114.

demanded the interposition of the God." [1] "Attraction and repulsion *are* matter." Then comes many pages of impassioned brooding on the conceptions thus set out with, and of quasi-mathematical extension of the premises, all leading up anew to the thing assumed at the outset — the finitude of the "universe of stars." "Gravity exists on account of Matter's having been irradiated, at its origin, atomically, into a *limited sphere of space*, from one, individual, unconditional, irrelative and absolute Particle Proper. . . ." [2] Thus we get rid of "the impossible conception of an infinite extension of Matter," and set up the other conception of an "illimitable Universe of Vacancy beyond." [3]

But here the poet flinches, as well he might, and we have this confession: —

"Let me declare only that, as an individual, I myself feel impelled to *fancy*, without daring to call it more — that there *does* exist a *limitless* succession of Universes, more or less similar to that of which we have cognizance — to that of which *alone* we shall ever have cognizance — at the very least until the return of our own particular Universe into Unity. *If* such clusters of clusters exist, however — *and they do* — it is abundantly clear that having no part in our origin, they have no portion in our laws. They neither attract us, nor we them. Their material, their spirit is not ours, is not that which obtains in any part of our Universe. They could not impress our senses or our souls. . . . Each exists, apart and independently, *in the bosom of its proper and particular God*." [4]

And in the end the proposition is, on the one hand: —

"That each soul is, in part, its own God, its own Creator; in a word, that God — *now* exists solely in the diffused matter and Spirit of the Universe; and that the regathering of this diffused Matter and Spirit will be but the reconstitution of the *purely* Spiritual and Individual God;"

while, on the other hand, this God is "one of an absolutely infinite number of similar Beings that people the absolutely infinite domains of the absolutely infinite space." [5] And yet he had earlier insisted, in the spirit of modern Monism, on "the condensation of *laws* into law," and the conclusion that "each law of Nature is dependent at all points upon all other laws," [6] a maxim which quashes his infinity of irrelated universes and Gods; and again he insisted: "That Nature and the God of Nature are distinct, no thinking

[1] *Works*, Vol. III. p. 113.
[2] P. 137.
[3] P. 163.
[4] P. 164; italics Poe's.
[5] P. 194.
[6] P. 147.

being can doubt "[1] — a doctrine which quashes his unitary Pantheism. Thus, on his own principle that "a perfect consistency can be nothing but an absolute truth," [2] he has definitely missed truth. It is the fate of all theosophies. And still his failure, in virtue of the mere energy and sustained imaginativeness of its reasoning, is a permanently notable philosophical document — this though his neurosis was visibly worsening at the time of the composition to the point of affecting its whole tone, and much of the reasoning. Capacity in this kind must be measured comparatively; and it needs neither dissent nor agreement, but simply acquaintance with the average run of theistic and cosmological reasoning, to come to the opinion that Poe is in these matters as abnormal, as intensely intellectual, as he is in everything else.[3] The book —

[1] *Works*, Vol. III. p. 147. [2] P. 100.

[3] The very hostile critique of the *Eureka* by Professor Irving Stringham, reprinted in the notes to Vol. IX. of Messrs. Stedman and Woodberry's edition, really concedes all that is above claimed for the treatise as an exhibition of intellectual power, though denying it all scientific originality and pronouncing the philosophical argument the "degrading self-delusion of an arrogant and fatuous mind." This is a sample of the language constantly used by American writers towards a man in whom brain disease can be diagnosed with moral certainty. Everything Poe wrote, in his final and swiftly failing years, is discussed by most of his detractors without a suggestion that it comes from a shaken reason. The note of malice is normal. Professor Stringham takes as absolutely certain the story that Poe once said: "My whole nature utterly revolts at the idea that there is any Being in the universe superior to myself." Now, that story (see it in Ingram's *Life*, Chap. XVIII.) has a most dubious aspect, coming as it does from a rather fanatical theist; and I confess I have always doubted its truth. If it *were* true, it would to a candid critic suggest incipient mania. On the other hand, it is essentially unjust so to discuss Poe's essay as to convey the idea that it ranks low among similar treatises. Professor Stringham calls it worthless, and a waste of time. If the same thing be said of the philosophies of Berkeley, Kant, and Hegel — as it might just as well be — the disparagement of Poe would be somewhat discounted. But the candour of the current American criticism of Poe may be gathered from a comparison of the language held towards his fallacies with that used in regard to the merely childish theism of Mr. Lowell and Mr. Lanier, and the random pantheism of Emerson. On this head it may be added that Professor Stringham's criticism of Poe breaks down even on some scientific issues. He affirms of Poe's doctrine that the universe is in a state of ever-swifter collapse: "than this, nothing could be more at variance with the great law of the conservation of energy." There is no such contradiction in the case; and if there were it would be equally chargeable against Mr. Spencer's theory of rhythmal disintegration and reintegration. Again, Professor Stringham charges Poe with showing "fundamental ignorance of astronomy" in saying that "the planets rotate (on their own axes) in elliptical orbits," without noting the need for a source of attraction at the foci of the ellipse. Yet Poe had expressly said in his *Addenda* to the *Eureka* (printed before Professor Stringham's critique in the new edition) that the sun's axis of rotation was "not the centre of his figure," and in the main treatise he had cited Lagrange's doctrine as to a variation of the orbits of the spheroids from circle to ellipse, and back again, by reason of variation in their axes. I do not undertake to say that Poe's conception is sound; but I do say that Professor Stringham has misrepresented him.

for it is a book in itself — has, indeed, some bad passages, where he essays to be humorous; but as against this, it exhibits a competence in matters of abstract science, and a hold of scientific cosmic theory, that no English man of letters of that day possessed. Much subsequent scientific thinking is anticipated here; Mr. Spencer, in particular, might have drawn from it his fundamental principle of the correlation of progress and heterogeneity; and the poet is here found triumphantly and independently defending the Nebular Hypothesis at a time when former exponents of it had wavered and proposed to abandon it.

To Dr. Browne's important commentary it might be added that in the preliminary section Poe emphatically forestalls some of the strongest recent declarations against the absolute Baconian theory of discovery,[1] that with two sweeps of his blade he demolishes a position which Mr. Balfour has only been able to take by laborious assault in his *Defence of Philosophic Doubt;* that he estimates Laplace with the confident discrimination of an expert; and that he speaks with intelligence on questions of astronomy which all but experts shun. Such is his measure of success, of impressiveness, in an undertaking in which he finally fails.

VII

When, after thus discursively scanning the achievement of Poe, we return to the contemplation of him as a personality, there arises a feeling of absorbing wonderment at the strange paradox of his being; the extraordinary union of this regnant intellect with that ill-starred temperament; the weakness of the man foiling the strength of the mind. The facts are plain. While he was writing his most rigorous criticisms, and building up his cosmogony in the white light and dry air of the altitudes of his reasoning imagination, the man was not merely stumbling under the burden of his constitutional vice as if smitten by sorcery, but was living an emotional life of passionate yearnings and rending griefs. It was a lamentable life. After his stormy youth, in the latter part of which we find him attacked by the most crushing hypochondria, there came the cruel train of pangs represented by the illness of his wife, who seems to have truly "died a hundred deaths" before the release

[1] Compare Mill, *System of Logic*, B. VI. Chap. V. § 5; Jevons, *Principles of Science*, p. 576; Tyndall, *Scientific Use of the Imagination and Other Essays*, 3d ed. pp. 4, 8–9, 42–3; and Bagehot, *Postulates of English Political Economy*, Student's ed., pp. 17–19.

came; and in this period it was, on his own account, that in a state of absolute frenzy between his woe and his bitter poverty,[1] which seemed to league itself with disease against the young victim, he first gave way to delirious alcoholism. His wife's death left him heart-shaken, the long agony of her decline having deepened his feeling for her into a passion of pitying worship. As years passed on, the unstrung emotionalism of the man made him turn first to one and then to another woman for sympathy and love — this while he maintained to the outside world, save in his lapses, his grave, lofty, high-bred calm of manner; and bated no jot of skill or thoroughness in his artistic work. While he makes distracted love to Mrs. Whitman, he never slackens in his keen derision of the transcendentalists, whose cloudy philosophy he could not abide. He writes his story of *Hop Frog* with his old impassable artistic aloofness, and writes about it to "Annie" in a letter touched with hysteria. "Forced, unnatural, false," "strained, exaggerated, and unnatural," are the terms Mr. Stoddard applies to these love-letters and letters of ecstatic friendship; and we cannot gainsay him here, save in so far as he imputes falsity. The case is one which Mr. Stoddard's primitive scalpel cannot dissect: what seems to him bad acting is neurosis. On the side of the affections Poe's sensitiveness becomes absolute disease; till the man who was accused of having no heart is wrecked by his heart's vibrations. But the intellect is never really subjected: it is shaken and dethroned at times by the breaking temperament; but it is unconquered to the last. He becomes almost insane when his engagement with Mrs. Whitman is broken; but he again collects himself, and he goes his way in silence. It is eminently significant that, as Mr. Ingram notes, he shows no resentment at being charged with aspiring to be a "glorious devil," all mind and no heart,[2] as he

[1] In an article in *Harper's Magazine* for May, 1887, entitled "The Recent Movement in Southern Literature," the writer, Mr. Charles W. Coleman, jun., says he has before him a series of letters written by Poe's employer on the Richmond *Literary Messenger*, in which it is complained that Poe "is continually after me for money. I am as sick of his writings as I am of him, and am rather more than half inclined to send him up another dozen dollars, and along with them all his unpublished MSS.," most of which are called "stuff." For his Pym story Poe asks three dollars a page. "In reality," says the employer, "it has cost me twenty dollars per page" — a statement which is not explained. At last comes this: "Highly as I really think of Mr. Poe's talents, I shall be forced to give him notice in a week or so at the furthest, that I can no longer recognize him as editor of the *Messenger*." One is not highly impressed by the tone of the writer; but Poe's neediness seems clear.

[2] Mr. Stedman in his latest criticism of Poe (Introd. to vol. vi. of new ed. of *Works*, p. 24) says of him, more in the manner of Griswold than in that of Mr.

was by some of the Brook Farm transcendentalists. The explanation, I think, clearly is that while he was conscious of his tendency to turn emotions into reasonings, he also knew his danger from his malady, and was eager to have it overlooked. "In the strange anomaly of my existence," says the narrator in *Berenice* — a story which offers abundant data for the "epilepsy" theory — "feelings with me had never been of the heart, and my passions always were of the mind;" and here there is a certain touch of self-study; but we must not be misled by the phrase. Passionately quick, on the one hand, to resent moral aspersions, and extravagant in his emotional outbursts, he had the pride of intellect in a sufficient degree to wish, in his normal condition, to be regarded as above emotional weakness. One who knew him in his latter days thought there was to be detected in him a constant effort for self-control.

Looking back on his hapless career, and contrasting his deserts with his lot, and with his reputation, one realizes with new certainty the worthlessness of most contemporary judgments. There are stories of his scrupulous conscientiousness and of his social considerateness such as could be told of few of his detractors; and yet we find one of his women friends resorting to inaccurate phrenology to account for the defects she inferred in his moral nature. Absolutely innocent in his relations with women, though his unworldly romanticism in their regard carried him into some

Stedman's earlier essay: "A speck of reservation spoiled for him the fullest cup of esteem, even when tendered by the most knightly and authoritative hands. Lowell's *A Fable for Critics*, declaring 'three-fifths of him genius,' gave him an award which ought to content even an unreasonable man. As it was, the good-natured thrusts of one whose scholarship was unassailable, at his metrical and other hobbies, drew from him a somewhat coarse and vindictive review of the whole satire." It is true that Poe's review is bad in tone; but that does not put Mr. Stedman in the right, or bear out his zealous panegyric of Mr. Lowell. He oddly omits to cite the "two-fifths sheer fudge," though he seems to think that Poe ought to have welcomed Mr. Lowell's kicks for the sake of his sixpences. As against this addition to the countless one-sided verdicts on Poe, I must point out, (1) that Poe in his critique exhibits anger only over Mr. Lowell's very coarse attack on Southern slaveholders in general; (2) that though Mr. Lowell's lines on Poe were sufficiently impertinent he makes no protest on that head; (3) that Mr. Lowell's versification, on which Poe spends most of his blame, was really excessively bad, whatever his "scholarship" may have been, and cried aloud for a retort from the assailed metricist; and (4) that Poe's show of vindictiveness is as nothing compared with the passionate resentment exhibited in one of Mr. Lowell's letters, recently published (Vol. I. p. 109), on the score of Poe's having charged him with a plagiarism. An obvious blunder in Poe's citation of the passage imitated, he actually declares to have been a wilful perversion, though the easy exposure of it would at once tend to discredit Poe's charge. For the rest, Mr. Lowell's critical treatment of Thoreau makes it difficult for some of us to see in him the "knightly and authoritative" critical paragon of Mr. Stedman's worship.

miserable embroilments, he came to be reputed an extreme libertine; and his one fatal failing lost him some of the friendships he most needed;. virtue and goodness being not always as merciful as might be — not to say a trifle stupid. One of the most intensely concentrative and painstaking of writers, he has been stigmatized as indolent and spendthrift. To quote once more from the judgment of Professor Minto in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, a vindication which, it is to be hoped, will set the current [1] of a true appreciation of the man: — "Poe failed to make a living by literature, not because he was an irregular profligate in the vulgar sense, but because he did ten times as much work as he was paid to do — a species of profligacy perhaps, but not quite the same in kind as that with which he was charged by his biographer." Pity and praise, we repeat finally, are far more his due than blame. Morally he lives for us as the high-strung, birth-stricken, suffering man, "whom unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster," till, instead of the proud, noble countenance of the earlier days, we see in his latest portrait, as M. Hennequin describes it in his vivid French way, a "face as of an old woman, white and haggard, hollowed, relaxed, ploughed with all the lines of grief and of the shaken reason; where over the sunken eyes, dimmed and dolorous and far-gazing, there is throned the one feature unblemished still, the superb forehead, high and firm, behind which his soul is expiring." The pity of it all, and of the inexpressibly tragic conclusion, is too profound to be outweighed by the remembrance that the "delicate and splendid cerebral mechanism" remained, for its ratiocinative purposes, almost intact to the end. But it is by that magnificent endowment that the world is bound to remember him. Among the crowd of men of one or of a few capacities, winning distinction by giving their whole strength to this pursuit or that, and living with hardly any other intellectual interest, he stands forth as an intelligence of singularly various equipment and faculty. Science was not too dry for him; the analysis of style not too subtle or frivolous: he could frame exquisite verse and stringent logic with equal mastery and equal zeal. As a boy he had a turn for swimming such as would have led many men into a career of sheer athletics; in a paper on *The Philosophy of Furniture* he embodies a passion for

[1] In the dearth of adequate estimates of Poe, it is much to be able to add to Mr. Minto's that of Lord Tennyson, published after this essay was first written. According to the newspaper report, the Laureate in conversation or correspondence ranked Poe highest among American men of letters, describing some more popular writers as "pygmies" beside him.

minor æsthetics such as can serve some men for a life's mission. For him there were no parochial boundaries in the world of the intellect: he was free of all provinces; overproud of his range, perhaps, but with an unusual title to be proud. And thus it is that we are fain to think of him as more than a poet, more than a critic, more than an æsthete, more than a tale-teller, more than a scientific thinker; a strange combination not seen in every age, and lastingly remarkable as such. He was a great brain.

VIII

JOHN DRYDEN

(1631–1700)

PREFACE TO THE FABLES

(1700)

'Tis with a poet, as with a man who designs to build, and is very exact, as he supposes, in casting up the cost beforehand; but, generally speaking, he is mistaken in his account, and reckons short in the expense he first intended. He alters his mind as the work proceeds, and will have this or that convenience more, of which he had not thought when he began. So has it happened to me. I have built a house, where I intended but a lodge; yet with better success than a certain nobleman, who, beginning with a dog-kennel, never lived to finish the palace he had contrived.

From translating the first of Homer's *Iliads* (which I intended as an essay to the whole work) I proceeded to the translation of the twelfth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, because it contains, among other things, the causes, the beginning, and ending, of the Trojan war. Here I ought in reason to have stopped; but the speeches of Ajax and Ulysses lying next in my way, I could not balk them. When I had compassed them, I was so taken with the former part of the fifteenth book (which is the masterpiece of the whole *Metamorphoses*), that I enjoined myself the pleasing task of rendering it into English. And now I found, by the number of my verses, that they began to swell into a little volume; which gave me an occasion of looking backward on some beauties of my author, in his former books: there occurred to me the *Hunting of the Boar, Cinyras and Myrrha*, the good-natured story of *Baucis and Philemon*, with the rest, which I hope

I have translated closely enough, and given them the same turn of verse which they had in the original; and this, I may say without vanity, is not the talent of every poet. He who has arrived the nearest to it, is the ingenious and learned Sandys, the best versifier of the former age; if I may properly call it by that name, which was the former part of this concluding century. For Spenser and Fairfax both flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth; great masters in our language, and who saw much farther into the beauties of our numbers than those who immediately followed them. Milton was the poetical son of Spenser, and Mr. Waller of Fairfax, for we have our lineal descents and clans as well as other families. Spenser more than once insinuates that the soul of Chaucer was transfused into his body, and that he was begotten by him two hundred years after his decease. Milton has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original; and many besides myself have heard our famous Waller own that he derived the harmony of his numbers from the *Godfrey of Bulloign*, which was turned into English by Mr. Fairfax.

But to return. Having done with Ovid for this time, it came into my mind that our old English poet, Chaucer, in many things resembled him, and that with no disadvantage on the side of the modern author, as I shall endeavour to prove when I compare them; and as I am, and always have been, studious to promote the honour of my native country, so I soon resolved to put their merits to the trial, by turning some of the *Canterbury Tales* into our language, as it is now refined; for by this means, both the poets being set in the same light, and dressed in the same English habit, story to be compared with story, a certain judgment may be made betwixt them by the reader, without obtruding my opinion on him. Or if I seem partial to my countryman and predecessor in the laurel, the friends of antiquity are not few; and besides many of the learned, Ovid has almost all the beaux, and the whole fair sex, his declared patrons. Perhaps I have assumed somewhat more to myself than they allow me, because I have adventured to sum up the evidence; but the readers are the jury, and their privilege remains entire, to decide according to the merits of the cause, or, if they please, to bring it to another hearing before some other court. In the meantime, to follow the thread of my discourse (as thoughts, according to Mr. Hobbes, have always some connection), so from Chaucer I was led to think on Boccace, who was not only his contemporary, but also pursued the same

studies; wrote novels in prose, and many works in verse; particularly is said to have invented the octave rhyme, or stanza of eight lines, which ever since has been maintained by the practice of all Italian writers, who are, or at least assume the title of heroic poets. He and Chaucer, among other things, had this in common, that they refined their mother tongue; but with this difference, that Dante had begun to file their language, at least in verse, before the time of Boccace, who likewise received no little help from his master Petrarch. But the reformation of their prose was wholly owing to Boccace himself, who is yet the standard of purity in the Italian tongue, though many of his phrases are become obsolete, as in process of time it must needs happen. Chaucer (as you have formerly been told by our learned Mr. Rymer) first adorned and amplified our barren tongue from the Provençal, which was then the most polished of all the modern languages; but this subject has been copiously treated by that great critic, who deserves no little commendation from us his countrymen. For these reasons of time, and resemblance of genius, in Chaucer and Boccace, I resolved to join them in my present work, to which I have added some original papers of my own, which, whether they are equal or inferior to my other poems, an author is the most improper judge; and therefore I leave them wholly to the mercy of the reader. I will hope the best, that they will not be condemned; but if they should, I have the excuse of an old gentleman, who, mounting on horseback before some ladies, when I was present, got up somewhat heavily, but desired of the fair spectators that they would count four-score-and-eight before they judged him. By the mercy of God, I am already come within twenty years of his number, a cripple in my limbs; but what decays are in my mind, the reader must determine. I think myself as vigorous as ever in the faculties of my soul, excepting only my memory, which is not impaired to any great degree; and if I lose not more of it, I have no great reason to complain. What judgment I had, increases rather than diminishes; and thoughts, such as they are, come crowding in so fast upon me, that my only difficulty is to choose or to reject; to run them into verse, or to give them the other harmony of prose. I have so long studied and practised both, that they are grown into a habit, and become familiar to me. In short, though I may lawfully plead some part of the old gentleman's excuse, yet I will reserve it till I think I have greater need, and ask no grains of allowance for the faults

of this my present work, but those which are given of course to human frailty. I will not trouble my reader with the shortness of time in which I writ it, or the several intervals of sickness. They who think too well of their own performances, are apt to boast in their prefaces how little time their works have cost them, and what other business of more importance interfered; but the reader will be as apt to ask the question, why they allowed not a longer time to make their works more perfect? and why they had so despicable an opinion of their judges, as to thrust their indigested stuff upon them, as if they deserved no better?

With this account of my present undertaking, I conclude the first part of this discourse: in the second part, as at a second sitting, though I alter not the draught, I must touch the same features over again, and change the dead colouring of the whole. In general, I will only say, that I have written nothing which savours of immorality or profaneness; at least, I am not conscious to myself of any such intention. If there happen to be found an irreverent expression, or a thought too wanton, they are crept into my verses through my inadvertency; if the searchers find any in the cargo, let them be staved or forfeited, like contrabanded goods; at least, let their authors be answerable for them, as being but imported merchandise, and not of my own manufacture. On the other side, I have endeavoured to choose such fables, both ancient and modern, as contain in each of them some instructive moral, which I could prove by induction, but the way is tedious; and they leap foremost into sight, without the reader's trouble of looking after them. I wish I could affirm, with a safe conscience, that I had taken the same care in all my former writings; for it must be owned, that supposing verses are never so beautiful or pleasing, yet if they contain anything which shocks religion, or good manners, they are at best what Horace says of good numbers without good sense, *Versus inopes rerum, nugæque canoræ*.[1] Thus far, I hope, I am right in court, without renouncing my other right of self-defence, where I have been wrongfully accused, and my sense wire-drawn into blasphemy or bawdry, as it has often been by a religious lawyer, in a late pleading against the stage; in which he mixes truth with falsehood, and has not forgotten the old rule of calumniating strongly, that something may remain.

[1] [Verses barren of ideas, and songs of no account.]

I resume the thrid of my discourse with the first of my translations, which was the first *Iliad* of Homer. If it shall please God to give me longer life, and moderate health, my intentions are to translate the whole *Ilias;* provided still that I meet with those encouragements from the public, which may enable me to proceed in my undertaking with some cheerfulness. And this I dare assure the world beforehand, that I have found, by trial, Homer a more pleasing task than Virgil, though I say not the translation will be less laborious; for the Grecian is more according to my genius than the Latin poet. In the works of the two authors we may read their manners and inclinations, which are wholly different. Virgil was of a quiet, sedate temper; Homer was violent, impetuous, and full of fire. The chief talent of Virgil was propriety of thoughts, and ornament of words; Homer was rapid in his thoughts, and took all the liberties, both of numbers and of expressions, which his language, and the age in which he lived, allowed him. Homer's invention was more copious, Virgil's more confined; so that if Homer had not led the way, it was not in Virgil to have begun heroic poetry; for nothing can be more evident, than that the Roman poem is but the second part of the *Ilias;* a continuation of the same story, and the persons already formed. The manners of Æneas are those of Hector superadded to those which Homer gave him. The adventures of Ulysses in the *Odysseis* are imitated in the first six books of Virgil's *Æneis;* and though the accidents are not the same (which would have argued him of a servile copying, and total barrenness of invention), yet the seas were the same in which both the heroes wandered; and Dido cannot be denied to be the poetical daughter of Calypso. The six latter books of Virgil's poem are the four and twenty *Iliads* contracted; a quarrel occasioned by a lady, a single combat, battles fought, and a town besieged. I say not this in derogation to Virgil, neither do I contradict anything which I have formerly said in his just praise: for his episodes are almost wholly of his own invention; and the form which he has given to the telling, makes the tale his own, even though the original story had been the same. But this proves, however, that Homer taught Virgil to design; and if invention be the first virtue of an epic poet, then the Latin poem can only be allowed the second place. Mr. Hobbes, in the preface to his own bald translation of the *Ilias* (studying poetry as he did mathematics, when it was too late), Mr. Hobbes, I say, begins the praise of Homer where he should

have ended it. He tells us that the first beauty of an epic poem consists in diction, that is, in the choice of words, and harmony of numbers. Now the words are the colouring of the work, which in the order of nature is the last to be considered. The design, the disposition, the manners, and the thoughts are all before it: where any of those are wanting or imperfect, so much wants or is imperfect in the imitation of human life; which is in the very definition of a poem. Words, indeed, like glaring colours, are the first beauties that arise and strike the sight: but if the draught be false or lame, the figures ill-disposed, the manners obscure or inconsistent, or the thoughts unnatural, then the finest colours are but daubing, and the piece is a beautiful monster at the best. Neither Virgil nor Homer were deficient in any of the former beauties; but in this last, which is expression, the Roman poet is at least equal to the Grecian, as I have said elsewhere; supplying the poverty of his language by his musical ear, and by his diligence.

But to return: our two great poets, being so different in their tempers, one choleric and sanguine, the other phlegmatic and melancholic; that which makes them excel in their several ways is, that each of them has followed his own natural inclination, as well in forming the design, as in the execution of it. The very heroes show their authors: Achilles is hot, impatient, revengeful, etc., *Impiger*, *iracundus*, *inexorabilis*, *acer*, etc.[1] Æneas patient, considerate, careful of his people, and merciful to his enemies; ever submissive to the will of heaven — *quo fata trahunt, retrahuntque, sequamur*.[2] I could please myself with enlarging on this subject, but am forced to defer it to a fitter time. From all I have said I will only draw this inference, that the action of Homer being more full of vigour than that of Virgil, according to the temper of the writer, is of consequence more pleasing to the reader. One warms you by degrees; the other sets you on fire all at once, and never intermits its heat. 'Tis the same difference which Longinus makes betwixt the effects of eloquence in Demosthenes and Tully; one persuades, the other commands. You never cool while you read Homer, even not in the second book (a graceful flattery to his countrymen); but he hastens from the ships, and concludes not that book till he has made you

[1] [Energetic, choleric, inexorable, violent.]
[2] [Wherever the fates lead us back and forth, let us follow.]

an amends by the violent playing of a new machine. From thence he hurries on his action with variety of events, and ends it in less compass than two months. This vehemence of his, I confess, is more suitable to my temper; and therefore I have translated his first book with greater pleasure than any part of Virgil; but it was not a pleasure without pains. The continual agitations of the spirits must needs be a weakening of any constitution, especially in age; and many pauses are required for refreshment betwixt the heats; the *Iliad* of itself being a third part longer than all Virgil's works together.

This is what I thought needful in this place to say of Homer. I proceed to Ovid and Chaucer, considering the former only in relation to the latter. With Ovid ended the golden age of the Roman tongue; from Chaucer the purity of the English tongue began. The manners of the poets were not unlike: both of them were well-bred, well-natured, amorous, and libertine, at least in their writings, it may be also in their lives. Their studies were the same, philosophy and philology. Both of them were known in astronomy, of which Ovid's books of the *Roman Feasts*, and Chaucer's *Treatise of the Astrolabe*, are sufficient witnesses. But Chaucer was likewise an astrologer, as were Virgil, Horace, Persius, and Manilius. Both writ with wonderful facility and clearness; neither were great inventors; for Ovid only copied the Grecian fables, and most of Chaucer's stories were taken from his Italian contemporaries, or their predecessors. Boccace his *Decameron* was first published, and from thence our Englishman has borrowed many of his *Canterbury Tales;* yet that of *Palamon and Arcite* was written in all probability by some Italian wit in a former age, as I shall prove hereafter. The tale of *Grizild* was the invention of Petrarch; by him sent to Boccace, from whom it came to Chaucer. *Troilus and Cressida* was also written by a Lombard author, but much amplified by our English translator, as well as beautified; the genius of our countrymen in general being rather to improve an invention than to invent themselves, as is evident not only in our poetry, but in many of our manufactures. I find I have anticipated already, and taken up from Boccace before I come to him; but there is so much less behind; and I am of the temper of most kings, who love to be in debt, are all for present money, no matter how they pay it afterwards; besides, the nature of a preface is rambling, never wholly out of the way, nor in it. This I have learned from the practice

of honest Montaigne, and return at my pleasure to Ovid and Chaucer, of whom I have little more to say.

Both of them built on the inventions of other men; yet since Chaucer had something of his own, as the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, *The Cock and the Fox*, which I have translated, and some others, I may justly give our countryman the precedence in that part, since I can remember nothing of Ovid which was wholly his. Both of them understood the manners; under which name I comprehend the passions, and, in a larger sense, the descriptions of persons, and their very habits. For an example, I see Baucis and Philemon as perfectly before me, as if some ancient painter had drawn them; and all the pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales*, their humours, their features, and the very dress, as distinctly as if I had supped with them at the *Tabard* in Southwark. Yet even there too the figures in Chaucer are much more lively, and set in a better light; which though I have not time to prove, yet I appeal to the reader, and am sure he will clear me from partiality. The thoughts and words remain to be considered in the comparison of the two poets; and I have saved myself one half of that labour, by owning that Ovid lived when the Roman tongue was in its meridian, Chaucer in the dawning of our language; therefore that part of the comparison stands not on an equal foot, any more than the diction of Ennius and Ovid, or of Chaucer and our present English. The words are given up as a post not to be defended in our poet, because he wanted the modern art of fortifying. The thoughts remain to be considered; and they are to be measured only by their propriety, that is, as they flow more or less naturally from the persons described, on such and such occasions. The vulgar judges, which are nine parts in ten of all nations, who call conceits and jingles wit, who see Ovid full of them, and Chaucer altogether without them, will think me little less than mad, for preferring the Englishman to the Roman; yet, with their leave, I must presume to say, that the things they admire are only glittering trifles, and so far from being witty, that in a serious poem they are nauseous, because they are unnatural. Would any man, who is ready to die for love, describe his passion like Narcissus? Would he think of *inopem me copia fecit*,[1] and a dozen more of such expressions, poured on the neck of one another, and signifying all the same thing? If this were wit, was this a time to be witty, when the poor wretch was in the

[1] [Abundance has made me poor.]

agony of death? This is just John Littlewit in *Bartholomew Fair*, who had a conceit (as he tells you) left him in his misery; a miserable conceit. On these occasions the poet should endeavour to raise pity; but instead of this, Ovid is tickling you to laugh. Virgil never made use of such machines, when he was moving you to commiserate the death of Dido: he would not destroy what he was building. Chaucer makes Arcite violent in his love, and unjust in the pursuit of it; yet when he came to die, he made him think more reasonably: he repents not of his love, for that had altered his character, but acknowledges the injustice of his proceedings, and resigns Emilia to Palamon. What would Ovid have done on this occasion? He would certainly have made Arcite witty on his death-bed. He had complained he was farther off from possession by being so near, and a thousand such boyisms, which Chaucer rejected as below the dignity of the subject. They, who think otherwise, would by the same reason prefer Lucan and Ovid to Homer and Virgil, and Martial to all four of them. As for the turn of words, in which Ovid particularly excels all poets, they are sometimes a fault, and sometimes a beauty, as they are used properly or improperly; but in strong passions always to be shunned, because passions are serious, and will admit no playing. The French have a high value for them; and, I confess, they are often what they call delicate, when they are introduced with judgment; but Chaucer writ with more simplicity, and followed nature more closely, than to use them. I have thus far, to the best of my knowledge, been an upright judge betwixt the parties in competition, not meddling with the design nor the disposition of it, because the design was not their own, and in the disposing of it they were equal. It remains that I say somewhat of Chaucer in particular.

In the first place, as he is the father of English poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer or the Romans Virgil: he is a perpetual fountain of good sense, learned in all sciences, and therefore speaks properly on all subjects; as he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off, a continence which is practised by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace. One of our late great poets is sunk in his reputation, because he could never forgive any conceit which came in his way, but swept like a dragnet great and small. There was plenty enough, but the dishes were ill-sorted; whole pyramids of sweetmeats for boys and

women, but little of solid meat for men: all this proceeded not from any want of knowledge, but of judgment; neither did he want that in discerning the beauties and faults of other poets, but only indulged himself in the luxury of writing, and perhaps knew it was a fault, but hoped the reader would not find it. For this reason, though he must always be thought a great poet, he is no longer esteemed a good writer; and for ten impressions, which his works have had in so many successive years, yet at present a hundred books are scarcely purchased once a twelve-month; for as my last Lord Rochester said, though somewhat profanely, "Not being of God, he could not stand."

Chaucer followed nature everywhere, but was never so bold to go beyond her; and there is a great difference of being *poeta* and *nimis poeta*,[1] if we believe Catullus, as much as betwixt a modest behaviour and affectation. The verse of Chaucer, I confess, is not harmonious to us, but 'tis like the eloquence of one whom Tacitus commends, it was *auribus istius temporis accommodata:*[2] they who lived with him, and some time after him, thought it musical; and it continues so even in our judgment, if compared with the numbers of Lydgate and Gower, his contemporaries; there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect. 'Tis true I cannot go so far as he who published the last edition of him; for he would make us believe the fault is in our ears, and that there were really ten syllables in a verse where we find but nine, but this opinion is not worth confuting, it is so gross and obvious an error that common sense (which is a rule in everything but matters of faith and revelation) must convince the reader that equality of numbers in every verse, which we call heroic, was either not known, or not always practised, in Chaucer's age. It were an easy matter to produce some thousands of his verses, which are lame for want of half a foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no pronunciation can make otherwise. We can only say that he lived in the infancy of our poetry, and that nothing is brought to perfection at the first. We must be children before we grow men. There was an Ennius, and in process of time a Lucilius and a Lucretius, before Virgil and Horace; even after Chaucer there was a Spenser, a Harrington, a Fairfax, before Waller and Denham were in being; and our numbers were in

[1] [Too much of a poet.] [2] [Tempered to the ear of the very times.]

their nonage till these last appeared. I need say little of his parentage, life, and fortunes: they are to be found at large in all the editions of his works. He was employed abroad, and favoured by Edward the Third, Richard the Second, and Henry the Fourth, and was poet, as I suppose, to all three of them. In Richard's time, I doubt, he was a little dipt in the rebellion of the Commons, and being brother-in-law to John of Gaunt, it was no wonder if he followed the fortunes of that family, and was well with Henry the Fourth when he had deposed his predecessor. Neither is it to be admired that Henry, who was a wise as well as a valiant prince, who claimed by succession, and was sensible that his title was not sound, but was rightfully in Mortimer, who had married the heir of York; it was not to be admired, I say, if that great politician should be pleased to have the greatest wit of those times in his interests, and to be the trumpet of his praises. Augustus had given him the example, by the advice of Mæcenas, who recommended Virgil and Horace to him, whose praises helped to make him popular while he was alive, and after his death have made him precious to posterity. As for the religion of our poet, he seems to have some little bias towards the opinions of Wickliff, after John of Gaunt his patron; somewhat of which appears in the tale of *Piers Plowman:* yet I cannot blame him for inveighing so sharply against the vices of the clergy in his age; their pride, their ambition, their pomp, their avarice, their worldly interest deserved the lashes which he gave them, both in that and in most of his *Canterbury Tales:* neither has his contemporary Boccace spared them. Yet both these poets lived in much esteem with good and holy men in orders; for the scandal which is given by particular priests, reflects not on the sacred function. Chaucer's Monk, his Canon, and his Friar took not from the character of his Good Parson. A satirical poet is the check of the laymen on bad priests. We are only to take care that we involve not the innocent with the guilty in the same condemnation. The good cannot be too much honoured, nor the bad too coarsely used; for the corruption of the best becomes the worst. When a clergyman is whipped his gown is first taken off, by which the dignity of his order is secured; if he be wrongfully accused, he has his action of slander; and it is at the poet's peril if he transgress the law. But they will tell us that all kind of satire, though never so well-deserved by particular priests, yet brings the whole order into contempt. Is, then, the peerage of England anything dishonoured when a peer suffers for his treason? If he be libelled,

or any way defamed, he has his *Scandalum Magnatum* [1] to punish the offender. They who use this kind of argument seem to be conscious to themselves of somewhat which has deserved the poet's lash, and are less concerned for their public capacity than for their private; at least there is pride at the bottom of their reasoning. If the faults of men in orders are only to be judged among themselves, they are all in some sort parties; for, since they say the honour of their order is concerned in every member of it, how can we be sure that they will be impartial judges? How far I may be allowed to speak my opinion in this case I know not, but I am sure a dispute of this nature caused mischief in abundance betwixt a King of England and an Archbishop of Canterbury; one standing up for the laws of his land, and the other for the honour (as he called it) of God's Church; which ended in the murder of the prelate, and in the whipping of his majesty from post to pillar for his penance. The learned and ingenious Dr. Drake has saved me the labour of inquiring into the esteem and reverence which the priests have had of old; and I would rather extend than diminish any part of it: yet I must needs say, that when a priest provokes me without any occasion given him, I have no reason, unless it be the charity of a Christian, to forgive him. *Prior laesit* [2] is justification sufficient in the civil law. If I answer him in his own language, self-defence, I am sure, must be allowed me; and if I carry it farther, even to a sharp recrimination, somewhat may be indulged to human frailty. Yet my resentment has not wrought so far, but that I have followed Chaucer, in his character of a holy man, and have enlarged on that subject with some pleasure, reserving to myself the right, if I shall think fit hereafter, to describe another sort of priests, such as are more easily to be found than the Good Parson; such as have given the last blow to Christianity in this age, by a practice so contrary to their doctrine. But this will keep cold till another time. In the meanwhile, I take up Chaucer where I left him.

He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the whole English nation, in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims

[1] ["In law, the offense of speaking slanderously or in defamation of high personages (magnates) of the realm, as temporal and spiritual peers, judges, and other high officers." — *Century Dictionary.*]

[2] [He did the first injury.]

are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations, but in their very physiognomies and persons. Baptista Porta could not have described their natures better than by the marks which the poet gives them. The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different educations, humours, and callings that each of them would be improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity: their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding; such as are becoming of them, and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious, and some virtuous; some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different: the Reeve, the Miller, and the Cook are several men, and distinguished from each other, as much as the mincing Lady-Prioress, and the broad-speaking gap-toothed Wife of Bath. But enough of this: there is such a variety of game springing up before me, that I am distracted in my choice, and know not which to follow. 'Tis sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty. We have our forefathers and great-grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days; their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other names than those of Monks, and Friars, and Canons, and Lady Abbesses, and Nuns; for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of nature, though everything is altered. May I have leave to do myself the justice (since my enemies will do me none, and are so far from granting me to be a good poet that they will not allow me so much as to be a Christian, or a moral man), may I have leave, I say, to inform my reader that I have confined my choice to such tales of Chaucer as savour nothing of immodesty? If I had desired more to please than to instruct, the Reeve, the Miller, the Shipman, the Merchant, the Summoner, and, above all, the Wife of Bath, in the prologue to her tale, would have procured me as many friends and readers as there are beaux and ladies of pleasure in the town. But I will no more offend against good manners: I am sensible, as I ought to be, of the scandal I have given by my loose writings, and make what reparation I am able by this public acknowledgment. If anything of this nature, or of profaneness, be crept into these poems, I am so far from defending it that I disown it. *Totum hoc indictum volo.*[1] Chaucer makes another manner of apology

[1] [All this I wish unsaid.]

for his broad speaking, and Boccace makes the like; but I will follow neither or them. Our countryman, in the end of his *Characters*, before the *Canterbury Tales*, thus excuses the ribaldry, which is very gross in many of his novels.

> But firste, I pray you of your courtesy,
> That ye ne arrete it not my villany,
> Though that I plainly speak in this mattere
> To tellen you her words, and eke her chere:
> Ne though I speak her words properly,
> For this ye knowen as well as I,
> Who shall tellen a tale after a man,
> He mote rehearse as nye as ever he can
> Everich word of it be in his charge,
> *All speke he, never so rudely, ne large.*
>
> Or else he mote tellen his tale untrue,
> Or feine things, or find words new:
> He may not spare, altho he were his brother,
> He mote as well say o word as another.
> Christ spake himself ful broad in holy writ,
> And well I wot no villany is it.
> Eke Plato saith, who so can him rede,
> The words mote been cousin to the dede.

Yet if a man should have inquired of Boccace or of Chaucer, what need they had of introducing such characters where obscene words were proper in their mouths, but very indecent to be heard; I know not what answer they could have made; for that reason, such tales shall be left untold by me. You have here a specimen of Chaucer's language, which is so obsolete, that his sense is scarce to be understood; and you have likewise more than one example of his unequal numbers, which were mentioned before. Yet many of his verses consist of ten syllables, and the words not much behind our present English: as, for example, these two lines, in the description of the Carpenter's young wife: —

> Wincing she was, as is a jolly colt,
> Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.

I have almost done with Chaucer, when I have answered some objections relating to my present work. I find some people are offended that I have turned these tales into modern English; because they think them unworthy of my pains, and look on Chaucer as a dry, old-fashioned wit, not worth reviving. I have often heard the late Earl of Leicester say, that Mr. Cowley himself was of that

opinion; who, having read him over at my lord's request, declared he had no taste of him. I dare not advance my opinion against the judgment of so great an author: but I think it fair, however, to leave the decision to the public. Mr. Cowley was too modest to set up for a dictator; and being shocked perhaps with his old style, never examined into the depth of his good sense. Chaucer, I confess, is a rough diamond, and must first be polished, ere he shines. I deny not, likewise, that, living in our early times he writes not always of a piece, but sometimes mingles trivial things with those of greater moment. Sometimes also, though not often, he runs riot, like Ovid, and knows not when he has said enough. But there are more great wits besides Chaucer, whose fault is their excess of conceits, and those ill sorted. An author is not to write all he can, but only all he ought. Having observed this redundancy in Chaucer (as it is an easy matter for a man of ordinary parts to find a fault in one of greater), I have not tied myself to a literal translation; but have often omitted what I judged unnecessary, or not of dignity enough to appear in the company of better thoughts. I have presumed farther, in some places, and added somewhat of my own where I thought my author was deficient, and had not given his thoughts their true lustre, for want of words in the beginning of our language. And to this I was the more emboldened, because (if I may be permitted to say it of myself) I found I had a soul congenial to his, and that I had been conversant in the same studies. Another poet, in another age, may take the same liberty with my writings; if at least they live long enough to deserve correction. It was also necessary sometimes to restore the sense of Chaucer, which was lost or mangled in the errors of the press: let this example suffice at present; in the story of *Palamon and Arcite*, where the temple of Diana is described, you find these verses, in all the editions of our author: —

> There saw I Danè turned into a tree,
> I mean not the goddess Diane,
> But Venus daughter, which that hight Danè:

Which, after a little consideration, I knew was to be reformed into this sense, that Daphne, the daughter of Peneus, was turned into a tree. I durst not make thus bold with Ovid, lest some future Milbourn should arise, and say, I varied from my author, because I understood him not.

But there are other judges who think I ought not to have translated Chaucer into English, out of a quite contrary notion: they

suppose there is a certain veneration due to his old language; and that it is a little less than profanation and sacrilege to alter it. They are farther of opinion, that somewhat of his good sense will suffer in this transfusion, and much of the beauty of his thoughts will infallibly be lost, which appear with more grace in their old habit. Of this opinion was that excellent person, whom I mentioned, the late Earl of Leicester, who valued Chaucer as much as Mr. Cowley despised him. My lord dissuaded me from this attempt (for I was thinking of it some years before his death), and his authority prevailed so far with me, as to defer my undertaking while he lived, in deference to him: yet my reason was not convinced with what he urged against it. If the first end of a writer be to be understood, then as his language grows obsolete, his thoughts must grow obscure: —

> Multa renascentur quae nunc cecidere; cadentque,
> Quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula si volet usus
> Quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi.[1]

When an ancient word for its sound and significancy deserves to be revived, I have that reasonable veneration for antiquity, to restore it. All beyond this is superstition. Words are not like landmarks, so sacred as never to be removed; customs are changed, and even statutes are silently repealed, when the reason ceases for which they were enacted. As for the other part of the argument, that his thoughts will lose of their original beauty, by the innovation of words; in the first place, not only their beauty but their being is lost, where they are no longer understood, which is the present case. I grant that something must be lost in all transfusion, that is, in all translations; but the sense will remain, which would otherwise be lost, or at least be maimed, when it is scarce intelligible; and that but to a few. How few are there who can read Chaucer, so as to understand him perfectly! And if perfectly, then with less profit and no pleasure. 'Tis not for the use of some old Saxon friends that I have taken these pains with him: let them neglect my version because they have no need of it. I made it for their sakes who understand sense and poetry as well as they, when that poetry and sense is put into words which they understand. I will go farther, and dare to add, that what beauties I lose in some places,

[1] [Many words will be restored which now have fallen out of use, and many words will pass which are now in honor — if custom so decrees, in whose power is the rule and the law and the pattern of speaking.]

I give to others which had them not originally; but in this I may be partial to myself; let the reader judge, and I submit to his decision. Yet I think I have just occasion to complain of them, who, because they understand Chaucer, would deprive the greater part of their countrymen of the same advantage, and hoard him up, as misers do their grandam gold, only to look on it themselves, and hinder others from making use of it. In sum, I seriously protest, that no man ever had, or can have, a greater veneration for Chaucer than myself. I have translated some part of his works, only that I might perpetuate his memory, or at least refresh it, amongst my countrymen. If I have altered him anywhere for the better, I must at the same time acknowledge that I could have done nothing without him: *Facile est inventis addere*,[1] is no great commendation; and I am not so vain to think I have deserved a greater. I will conclude what I have to say of him singly, with this one remark: a lady of my acquaintance, who keeps a kind of correspondence with some authors of the fair sex in France, has been informed by them that Mademoiselle de Scudéry, who is as old as Sibyl, and inspired like her by the same god of poetry, is at this time translating Chaucer into modern French. From which I gather that he has been formerly translated into the old Provençal; for how she should come to understand old English I know not. But the matter of fact being true, it makes me think that there is something in it like fatality; that, after certain periods of time, the fame and memory of great wits should be renewed, as Chaucer is both in France and England. If this be wholly chance, 'tis extraordinary, and I dare not call it more for fear of being taxed with superstition.

Boccace comes last to be considered, who, living in the same age with Chaucer, had the same genius, and followed the same studies. Both writ novels, and each of them cultivated his mother tongue. But the greatest resemblance of our two modern authors being in their familiar style, and pleasing way of relating comical adventures, I may pass it over, because I have translated nothing from Boccace of that nature. In the serious part of poetry, the advantage is wholly on Chaucer's side; for though the Englishman has borrowed many tales from the Italian, yet it appears that those of Boccace were not generally of his own making, but taken from authors of former ages, and by him only modelled; so that what there was of invention in either of them may be judged equal. But Chaucer has refined on Boccace, and has mended the stories, which

[1] [It is easy to add to what is already there.]

he has borrowed, in his way of telling; though prose allows more liberty of thought, and the expression is more easy when unconfined by numbers. Our countryman carries weight, and yet wins the race at disadvantage. I desire not the reader should take my word, and therefore I will set two of their discourses on the same subject, in the same light, for every man to judge betwixt them. I translated Chaucer first, and amongst the rest pitched on *The Wife of Bath's Tale* — not daring, as I have said, to adventure on her *Prologue*, because it is too licentious. There Chaucer introduces an old woman of mean parentage, whom a youthful knight of noble blood was forced to marry, and consequently loathed her. The crone being in bed with him on the wedding-night, and finding his aversion, endeavours to win his affection by reason, and speaks a good word for herself (as who could blame her?) in hope to mollify the sullen bridegroom. She takes her topics from the benefits of poverty, the advantages of old age and ugliness, the vanity of youth, and the silly pride of ancestry and titles without inherent virtue, which is the true nobility. When I had closed Chaucer I returned to Ovid, and translated some more of his fables; and by this time had so far forgotten *The Wife of Bath's Tale* that, when I took up Boccace, unawares I fell on the same argument of preferring virtue to nobility of blood, and titles, in the story of Sigismunda, which I had certainly avoided for the resemblance of the two discourses, if my memory had not failed me. Let the reader weigh them both, and if he thinks me partial to Chaucer, 'tis in him to right Boccace.

I prefer, in our countryman, far above all his other stories, the noble poem of *Palamon and Arcite*, which is of the epic kind, and perhaps not much inferior to the *Ilias* or the *Æneis*. The story is more pleasing than either of them, the manners as perfect, the diction as poetical, the learning as deep and various, and the disposition full as artful; only it includes a greater length of time, as taking up seven years at least; but Aristotle has left undecided the duration of the action, which yet is easily reduced into the compass of a year by a narration of what preceded the return of Palamon to Athens. I had thought for the honour of our nation, and more particularly for his whose laurel, though unworthy, I have worn after him, that this story was of English growth and Chaucer's own; but I was undeceived by Boccace, for casually looking on the end of his seventh *Giornata*, I found Dioneo (under which name he shadows himself) and Fiametta (who represents his mistress, the natural daughter of Robert, King of Naples), of whom

these words are spoken, *Dioneo e Fiametta gran pezza contarono insieme d'Arcita, e di Palamone;*[1] by which it appears that this story was written before the time of Boccace; but the name of its author being wholly lost, Chaucer is now become an original, and I question not but the poem has received many beauties by passing through his noble hands. Besides this tale, there is another of his own invention, after the manner of the Provençals, called *The Flower and the Leaf*, with which I was so particularly pleased, both for the invention and the moral, that I cannot hinder myself from recommending it to the reader.

As a corollary to this preface, in which I have done justice to others, I owe somewhat to myself; not that I think it worth my time to enter the lists with one Milbourn and one Blackmore, but barely to take notice that such men there are who have written scurrilously against me without any provocation. Milbourn, who is in orders, pretends, amongst the rest, this quarrel to me, that I have fallen foul on priesthood; if I have, I am only to ask pardon of good priests, and am afraid his part of the reparation will come to little. Let him be satisfied that he shall not be able to force himself upon me for an adversary. I contemn him too much to enter into competition with him. His own translations of Virgil have answered his criticisms on mine. If (as they say, he has declared in print) he prefers the version of Ogilby to mine, the world has made him the same compliment, for 'tis agreed, on all hands, that he writes even below Ogilby. That, you will say, is not easily to be done; but what cannot Milbourn bring about? I am satisfied, however, that while he and I live together, I shall not be thought the worst poet of the age. It looks as if I had desired him underhand to write so ill against me; but upon my honest word, I have not bribed him to do me this service, and am wholly guiltless of his pamphlet. 'Tis true, I should be glad if I could persuade him to continue his good offices, and write such another critique on anything of mine; for I find by experience he has a great stroke with the reader, when he condemns any of my poems, to make the world have a better opinion of them. He has taken some pains with my poetry, but nobody will be persuaded to take the same with his. If I had taken to the church, as he affirms, but which was never in my thoughts, I should have had more sense, if not more grace, than to have turned myself out of my benefice by writing libels on my parishioners. But his account of my manners and my principles

[1] [Dioneo and Fiametta together told a long tale of Arcite and of Palamon.]

are of a piece with his cavils and his poetry; and so I have done with him forever.

As for the City Bard, or Knight Physician, I hear his quarrel to me is, that I was the author of *Absalom and Achitophel*, which he thinks was a little hard on his fanatic patrons in London.

But I will deal the more civilly with his two poems, because nothing ill is to be spoken of the dead, and therefore peace be to the Manes of his *Arthurs*. I will only say that it was not for this noble knight that I drew the plan of an epic poem on *King Arthur* in my preface to the translation of Juvenal. The guardian angels of kingdoms were machines too ponderous for him to manage; and therefore he rejected them, as Dares did the whirlbats of Eryx, when they were thrown before him by Entellus. Yet from that preface he plainly took his hint; for he began immediately upon his story, though he had the baseness not to acknowledge his benefactor; but instead of it, to traduce me in a libel.

I shall say the less of Mr. Collier, because in many things he has taxed me justly, and I have pleaded guilty to all thoughts and expressions of mine which can be truly argued of obscenity, profaneness, or immorality, and retract them. If he be my enemy, let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no personal occasion to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentance. It becomes me not to draw my pen in the defence of a bad cause when I have so often drawn it for a good one. Yet it were not difficult to prove that in many places he has perverted my meaning by his glosses, and interpreted my words into blasphemy and bawdry, of which they were not guilty. Besides that he is too much given to horse-play in his raillery, and comes to battle like a dictator from the plough. I will not say the zeal of God's house has eaten him up, but I am sure it has devoured some part of his good manners and civility. It might also be doubted whether it were altogether zeal which prompted him to this rough manner of proceeding; perhaps it became not one of his function to rake into the rubbish of ancient and modern plays. A divine might have employed his pains to better purpose than in the nastiness of Plautus and Aristophanes, whose examples, as they excuse not me, so it might be possibly supposed that he read them not without some pleasure. They who have written commentaries on those poets, or on Horace, Juvenal, and Martial, have explained some vices which, without their interpretation, had been unknown to modern times. Neither has he judged impartially betwixt the former age and us. There is more

bawdry in one play of Fletcher's, called *The Custom of the Country*, than in all ours together. Yet this has been often acted on the stage in my remembrance. Are the times so much more reformed now than they were five and twenty years ago? If they are, I congratulate the amendment of our morals. But I am not to prejudice the cause of my fellow-poets, though I abandon my own defence: they have some of them answered for themselves, and neither they nor I can think Mr. Collier so formidable an enemy that we should shun him. He has lost ground at the latter end of the day by pursuing his point too far, like the Prince of Condé at the battle of Senneffe: from immoral plays to no plays, *ab abusu ad usum, non valet consequentia.*[1] But being a party, I am not to erect myself into a judge. As for the rest of those who have written against me, they are such scoundrels that they deserve not the least notice to be taken of them. Blackmore and Milbourn are only distinguished from the crowd by being remembered to their infamy: —

> — Demetri teque, Tigelli,
> Discipulorum inter jubeo plorare cathedras.[2]

[1] [To argue from the abuse of a thing against the use of that thing is inconsequential.]

[2] [You, Demetrius, and you, Tigellus, I bid howl among the seats of the learners.]

IX

FREDERIC HARRISON

(1831)

RUSKIN AS MASTER OF PROSE

[Chapter II. of *Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill, and Other Literary Estimates,* 1900.]

Is it indeed beyond hope that our generation should at last do entire justice to our brightest living genius, the most inspiring soul still extant amongst us, whilst he may yet be seen and heard in the flesh?

The world has long been of one mind as to the great charm in the writings of John Ruskin; it feels his subtle insight into all forms of beauty; and it has made familiar truisms of his central lessons in Art. But it has hardly yet understood that he stands forth now, alone and inimitable, as a supreme master of our English tongue; that as preacher, prophet (nay, some amongst us do not hesitate to say as saint), he has done more than as master of Art; that his moral and social influence on our time, more than his æsthetic impulse, will be the chief memory for which our descendants will hold him in honour.

Such genius, such zeal, such self-devotion, should have imposed itself upon the age without a dissentient voice; but the reputation of John Ruskin has been exposed to some singular difficulties. Above all, he is, to use an Italian phrase, *uomo antico:* a survival of a past age: a man of the thirteenth century pouring out sermons, denunciations, rhapsodies to the nineteenth century; and if Saint Bernard himself, in his garb of frieze and girdle of hemp, were to preach amongst us in Hyde Park to-day, too many of us would listen awhile, and then straightway go about our business with a smile. But John Ruskin is not simply a man of the thirteenth cen-

tury: he is a poet, a mystic, a missionary of the thirteenth century — romantic as was the young Dante in the days of his love and his chivalrous youth, and his Florentine rapture in all beautiful things, or as was the young Petrarch in the lifetime of his Laura, or the young Francis beginning to dream of a regeneration of Christendom through the teaching of his barefoot Friars.

Now John Ruskin not only is in his soul a thirteenth-century poet and mystic: but, being this, he would literally have the nineteenth century go back to the thirteenth: he means what he says: he acts on what he means. And he defies fact, the set of many ages, the actual generation around him, and still calls on them, alone and in spite of neglect and rebuffs, to go back to the Golden Ages of the Past. He would not reject this description of himself: he would proudly accept it. But this being so, it is inevitable that much of his teaching — all the teaching for which he cares most in his heart — must be in our day the voice of one preaching in the wilderness.

He claims to be not merely poet of the beautiful, but missionary of the truth; not so much judge in Art as master in Philosophy. And as such he repudiates modern science, modern machinery, modern politics — in a sense modern civilization as we know it and make it. Not merely is it his ideal to get rid of these; but in his own way he sets himself manfully to extirpate these things in practice from the visible life of himself and of those who surround him. Such heroic impossibilities recoil on his own head. The nineteenth century has been too strong for him. Iron, steam, science, democracy — have thrust him aside, and have left him in his old age little but a solitary and most pathetic Prophet, such as a John the Baptist by Mantegna, unbending, undismayed, still crying out to a scanty band around him — "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

I am one who believes most devoutly in the need of repentance, and in the ultimate, if not early, advent of a kingdom of the Beautiful and the Good. But like the world around me, I hold by the nineteenth century and not by the thirteenth: — or rather I trust that some Century to come may find means of reconciling the ages of Steam and the ages of Faith, of combining the best of all ages in one. Unluckily, as do other prophets, as do most mystics, John Ruskin will have undivided allegiance. With him, it is ever — all or none. Accept him and his lesson — wholly, absolutely, without murmur or doubt — or he will have none of your homage.

And the consequence is that his devotees have been neither many, nor impressive. His genius, as most men admit, will carry him at times into fabulous extravagances, and his exquisite tenderness of soul will ofttimes seem to be but a second childhood in the eyes of the world. Thus it has come to pass that the grotesque side of this noble Evangel of his has been perpetually thrust into the forefront of the fight; and those who have professed to expound the Gospel of Ruskin have been for the most part such lads and lasses as the world in its grossness regards with impatience, and turns from with a smile.

As one of the oldest and most fervent believers in his genius and the noble uses to which he has devoted it, I long to say a word or two in support of my belief: not that I have the shadow of a claim to speak as his disciple, to defend his utterances, or to represent his thoughts. In one sense, no doubt, I stand at an opposite pole of ideas, and in literal and direct words, I could hardly adopt any one of the leading doctrines of his creed. As to mine, he probably rejects everything I hold sacred and true with violent indignation and scorn. Morally, spiritually, as seen through a glass darkly, I believe that his teachers and my teachers are essentially one, and may yet be combined in the greater harmony that is to be. But to all this I should despair of inducing him to agree, or even to listen with patience. He regards me, I fear, as an utterly lost soul, destined to nothing but evil in this world and the next. And did he not once long ago, in private communication and in public excommunication, consign me to outer darkness, and cover with indignant scorn every man and everything in which I have put my trust?

The world has long been of one mind, I have said, as to the beauty of Ruskin's writing; but I venture to think that even yet full justice has not been rendered to his consummate mastery over our English tongue: that it has not been put high enough, and some of its unique qualities have not been perceived. Now I hold that in certain qualities, in given ways, and in some rarer passages of his, Ruskin not only surpasses every contemporary writer of prose (which indeed is obvious enough), but he calls out of our glorious English tongue notes more strangely beautiful and inspiring than any ever yet issued from that instrument. No writer of prose before or since has ever rolled forth such mighty fantasias, or reached such pathetic melodies in words, or composed long books in one sustained strain of limpid grace.

It is indeed very far from a perfect style: much less is it in any sense a model style, or one to be cultivated, studied, or followed. If any young aspirant were to think it could be imitated, better were a millstone hung round his neck and he were cast into the sea. No man can bend the bow of Ulysses: and if he dared to take down from its long rest the terrible weapon, such an one might give himself an ugly wound. Ulysses himself has shot with it wildly, madly, with preposterous overflying of the mark, and blind aiming at the wrong target. Ruskin, be it said in sorrow, has too often played unseemly pranks on his great instrument: is too often "in excess," as the Ethics put it, indeed he is usually "in excess"; he has used his mastery in mere exultation in his own mastery; and, as he now knows himself, he has used it out of wantonness — rarely, but very rarely, as in *The Seven Lamps*, in a spirit of display, or with reckless defiance of sense, good taste, reserve of strength — yet never with affectation, never as a tradesman, as a hack.

We need not enter here on the interminable debate about what is called "poetic prose," whether poetic prose be a legitimate form of expressing ideas. A good deal of nonsense has been talked about it; and the whole matter seems too much a dispute about terms. If prose be ornate with flowers of speech inappropriate to the idea expressed, or studiously affected, or obtrusively luscious — it is bad prose. If the language be proper to verse but improper to prose — it is bad prose. If the cadences begin to be obvious, if they tend to be actually scanned as verses, if the images are remote, lyrical, piled over one another, needlessly complicated, if the passage has to be read twice before we grasp its meanings — then it is bad prose. On the other hand, all ideas are capable of being expressed in prose, as well as in verse. They may be clothed with as much grace as is consistent with precision. If the sense be absolutely clear, the flow of words perfectly easy, the language in complete harmony with the thought, then no beauty in the phraseology can be misplaced — provided that this beauty is held in reserve, is to be unconsciously felt, not obviously thrust forward, and is always the beauty of prose, and not the beauty of verse.

It cannot be denied that Ruskin, especially in his earlier works, is too often obtrusively luscious, that his images are often lyrical, set in too profuse and gorgeous a mosaic. Be it so. But he is always perfectly, transparently clear, absolutely free from affected euphuism, never laboriously "precious," never grotesque, never eccentric. His besetting sins as a master of speech may be summed

up in his passion for profuse imagery, and delight in an almost audible melody of words. But how different is this from the laborious affectation of what is justly condemned as the "poetic prose" of a writer who tries to be fine, seeking to perform feats of composition, who flogs himself into a bastard sort of poetry, not because he enjoys it, but to impose upon an ignorant reader! This Ruskin never does. When he bursts the bounds of fine taste, and pelts us with perfumed flowers till we almost faint under their odour and their blaze of colour, it is because he is himself intoxicated with the joy of his blossoming thoughts, and would force some of his divine afflatus into our souls. The priestess of the Delphic god never spoke without inspiration, and then did not use the flat speech of daily life. Would that none ever spoke in books, until they felt the god working in their heart.

To be just, we should remember that a very large part of all that Ruskin treats concerns some scene of beauty, some work of fine art, some earnest moral exhortation, some indignant rebuke to meanness, — wherein passionate delight and passionate appeal are not merely lawful, but are of the essence of the lesson. Ruskin is almost always in an ecstasy of admiration, or in a fervour of sympathy, or in a grand burst of prophetic warning. It is his mission, his nature, his happiness so to be. And it is inevitable that such passion and eagerness should be clothed in language more remote from the language of conversation than is that of Swift or Hume. The language of the preacher is not, nor ought it to be, the language of the critic, the philosopher, the historian. Ruskin is a preacher: right or wrong he has to deliver his message, whether men will stay to hear it or not; and we can no more require him to limit his pace to the plain foot-plodding of unimpassioned prose than we can ask this of Saint Bernard, or of Bossuet, of Jeremy Taylor or Thomas Carlyle.

Besides all this, Ruskin has shown that, where the business in hand is simple instruction, philosophical argument, or mechanical exposition, he is master of an English style of faultless ease, simplicity, and point. When he wants to describe a plain thing, a particular instrument for drawing, a habit of Turner's work, the exact form of a boat, or a tower, or a shell, no one can surpass him, or equal him, in the clearness and precision of his words. His little book on the *Elements of Drawing* is a masterpiece in lucid explanation of simple mechanical rules and practices. *Præterita*, *Fors Clavigera*, and the recent notes to reprinted works, contain

easy bits of narration, of banter, of personal humour, that Swift, Defoe, Goldsmith, and Lamb might envy. Turn to that much-abused book, *Unto this Last* — the central book of his life, as it is the turning-point of his career — it is almost wholly free from every fault of excess with which he has been charged. Men may differ as to the argument. But no capable critic will doubt that as a type of philosophical discussion, its form is as fine and as pure as the form of Berkeley or of Hume.

But when, his whole soul aglow with some scene of beauty, transfigured by a profound moral emotion, he breaks forth into one of those typical descants of his, our judgment may still doubt if the colouring be not overcharged and the composition too crowded for perfect art, but we are carried away by its beauty, its rhythm, its pathos. We know that the sentence is too long, preposterously, impossibly sustained — 200 words and more — 250, nay, 280 words without a single pause — each sentence with 40, 50, 60 commas, colons, and semicolons — and yet the whole symphony flows on with such just modulation, the images melt so naturally into each other, the harmony of tone and the ease of words are so complete, that we hasten through the passage in a rapture of admiration. Milton often began, and once or twice completed, such a resounding voluntary on his glorious organ. But neither Milton, nor Browne, nor Jeremy Taylor, was yet quite master of the mighty instrument. Ruskin, who comes after two centuries of further and continuous progress in this art, is master of the subtle instrument of prose. And though it be true that too often, in wanton defiance of calm judgment, he will fling to the winds his self-control, he has achieved in this rare and perilous art some amazing triumphs of mastery over language, such as the whole history of our literature cannot match.

Lovers of Ruskin (that is all who read good English books) can recall, and many of them can repeat, hundreds of such passages, and they will grumble at an attempt to select any passage at all. But to make my meaning clear, I will turn to one or two very famous bits, not at all asserting that they are the most truly noble passages that Ruskin ever wrote, but as specimens of his more lyrical mood. He has himself spoken with slight of much of his earlier writing — often perhaps with undeserved humility. He especially regrets the *purpurei panni*,[1] as he calls them, of *The Seven Lamps* and cognate pieces. I will not quote any of these

[1] [Purple rags.]

purpurei panni, though I think that as *rhetorical prose*, as apodeictic perorations, English literature has nothing to compare with them. But they *are* rhetorical, somewhat artificial, manifest displays of eloquence — and we shall all agree that eloquent displays of rhetoric are not the best specimens of prose composition.

I take first a well-known piece of an early book (*Modern Painters*, Vol. IV. c. i., 1856), the old Tower of Calais Church, a piece which has haunted my memory for nearly forty years: —

"The large neglect, the noble unsightliness of it; the record of its years written so visibly, yet without sign of weakness or decay; its stern wasteness and gloom, eaten away by the Channel winds, and overgrown with the bitter sea grasses; its slates and tiles all shaken and rent, and yet not falling; its desert of brickwork, full of bolts, and holes, and ugly fissures, and yet strong, like a bare brown rock; its carelessness of what any one thinks or feels about it; putting forth no claim, having no beauty, nor desirableness, pride, nor grace; yet neither asking for pity; not, as ruins are, useless and piteous, feebly or fondly garrulous of better days; but useful still, going through its own daily work, — as some old fisherman, beaten gray by storm, yet drawing his daily nets: so it stands, with no complaint about its past youth, in blanched and meagre massiveness and serviceableness, gathering human souls together underneath it; the sound of its bells for prayer still rolling through its rents; and the gray peak of it seen far across the sea, principal of the three that rise above the waste of surfy sand and hillocked shore, — the lighthouse for life, and the belfry for labour, and this — for patience and praise."

This passage I take to be one of the most magnificent examples of the "pathetic fallacy" in our language. Perhaps the "pathetic fallacy" is second-rate art; the passage is too long — 211 words alas! without one full stop, and more than forty commas and other marks of punctuation — it has *trop de choses* — it has redundancies, tautologies, and artifices, if we are strictly severe — but what a picture, what pathos, what subtlety of observation, what nobility of association — and withal how complete is the unity of impression! How mournful, how stately is the cadence, most harmonious and yet peaceful is the phraseology, and how wonderfully do thought, the antique history, the picture, the musical bars of the whole piece combine in beauty! What fine and just images — "the large neglect," the "noble unsightliness." The tower is "eaten away by the Channel winds," "overgrown with bitter sea grasses." It is "careless," "puts forth no claim," has "no pride," does not "ask for pity," is not "fondly garrulous," as other ruins are, but still goes through its work, "like some old fisherman." It stands blanched, meagre, massive, but still serviceable, making

no complaint about its past youth. A wonderful bit of word-painting — and, perhaps, word-painting, at least on a big canvas, is not strictly lawful — but such a picture as few poets and no prose-writer has surpassed! Byron would have painted it in deeper, fiercer strokes. Shelley and Wordsworth would have been less definite. Coleridge would not have driven home the moral so earnestly; though Tennyson might have embodied it in the stanzas of *In Memoriam.*

I should like to take this passage as a text to point to a quality of Ruskin's prose in which, I believe, he has surpassed all other writers. It is the quality of musical *assonance.* There is plenty of *alliteration* in Ruskin, as there is in all fine writers: but the musical harmony of sound in Ruskin's happiest efforts is something very different from *alliteration,* and much more subtle. Coarse, obtrusive, artificial *alliteration, i.e.* the recurrence of words with the same initial letter, becomes, when crudely treated or overdone, a gross and irritating form of affectation. But the prejudice against alliteration may be carried too far. Alliteration is the natural expression of earnest feeling in every form — it is a physiological result of passion and impetuosity: — it becomes a defect when it is repeated too often, or in an obtrusive way, or when it becomes artificial, and studied. Whilst alliteration is spontaneous, implicit not explicit, felt not seen, the natural working of a fine ear, it is not only a legitimate expedient both of prose and of verse, but is an indispensable accessory of the higher harmonies, whether of verse or prose.

Ruskin uses alliteration much (it must be admitted, in profusion), but he relies on a far subtler resource of harmony — that is *assonance,* or as I should prefer to name it, *consonance.* I have never seen this quality treated at all systematically, but I am convinced that it is at the basis of all fine cadences both in verse and in prose. By *consonance* I mean *the recurrence of the same, or of cognate, sounds,* not merely in the first letter of words, but where the stress comes, in any part of a word, and that in sounds whether vowel or consonant. Grimm's law of interchangeable consonants applies; and all the well-known groupings of consonants may be noted. The liquids connote the sweeter, the gutturals the sterner ideas; the sibilants connect and organize the words. Of poets perhaps Milton, Shelley, and Tennyson make the fullest use of this resource. We need not suppose that it is consciously sought, or in any sense studied, or even observed by the poet. But *consonance,*

i.e. recurrence of the same or kindred sounds, is very visible when we look for it in a beautiful cadence. Take Tennyson's —

> **O**ld Yew, which grasp**est** at the **ston**es
> **Th**at **n**ame **th**e under-**ly**ing **d**ead,
> **Thy** fi**b**res **n**et **th**e **d**reamless hea**d**,
> **Thy** roots are **w**rapt a**b**out **th**e **bon**es.

How much does the music, nay the impressiveness, of this stanza depend on *consonance!* The great booming **O** with which it opens, is repeated in the last word of the first, and also of the last line. The cruel word "grasp**est**" is repeated in part in the harsh word "**st**ones." Three lines, and six words in all, begin with the soft "th": "**n**ame" is echoed by "**n**et," "under-**ly**ing" by "**d**reamless"; the "r" of "**r**oots" is heard again in "**w**rapt," the "b" in "fi**b**res," in "a**b**out," and "**b**ones." These are not at all accidental cases of *consonance.*

This musical *consonance* is quite present in fine prose, although many powerful writers seem to have had but little ear for its effects. Such men as Swift, Defoe, Gibbon, Macaulay, seldom advance beyond alliteration in the ordinary sense. But true *consonance*, or musical correspondence of note, is very perceptible in the prose of Milton, of Sir Thomas Browne, of Burke, of Coleridge, of De Quincey. Above all, it is especially marked in our English Bible, and in the Collects and grander canticles of the Prayer Book; and is the source of much of their power over us. Of all the masters of prose literature, John Ruskin has made the finest use of this resource, and with the most delicate and mysterious power. And this is no doubt due to his mind being saturated from childhood with the harmonies of our English Bible, and to his speaking to us with religious solemnity and in Biblical tones.

This piece about the tower of Calais Church is full of this beautiful and subtle form of alliteration or colliteration — "**th**e large **n**eglect, **th**e **n**oble unsightliness of it" — "**th**e re**c**or**d** of its **y**ears written **so** visibly, **y**et **w**ithout **s**ign of **w**eakness or **d**ecay" —"**th**e **sou**nd of its be**ll**s for **p**rayer **still roll**ing thr**ough** its **r**ents." Here in a single line are three liquid double "ll"; there are six "s"; there are are five "r" in seven words — "**soū**nd **rōll**ing thr**oūgh r**ents" is finely expressive of a peal of be'ls. And the passage ends with a triple alliteration — the second of the three being inverted: "bel" echoing to "lab"—"**th**e **l**ighthouse for

life, and the **bel**fry for **lab**our, and this — for **pa**tience and **pra**ise."

Turn to another famous passage (*Modern Painters*, Vol. IV. cap. 19), a somewhat overwrought, possibly unjust picture, stained as usual with the original sin of Calvinism, but a wonderful piece of imaginative description. It is the account of the peasant of the Valais, in the grand chapter on "Mountain Gloom."

"They do not understand so much as the name of beauty, or of knowledge. They understand dimly that of virtue. Love, patience, hospitality, faith, — these things they know. To glean their meadows side by side, so happier; to bear the burden up the breathless mountain flank unmurmuringly; to bid the stranger drink from their vessel of milk; to see at the foot of their low death-beds a pale figure upon a cross, dying, also patiently; — in this they are different from the cattle and from the stones; but, in all this, unrewarded, so far as concerns the present life. For them, there is neither hope nor passion of spirit; for them, neither advance nor exultation. Black bread, rude roof, dark night, laborious day, weary arm at sunset; and life ebbs away. No books, no thoughts, no attainments, no rest, — except only sometimes a little sitting in the sun under the church wall, as the bell tolls thin and far in the mountain air; a pattering of a few prayers, not understood, by the altar-rails of the dimly gilded chapel, — and so, back to the sombre home, with the cloud upon them still unbroken — that cloud of rocky gloom, born out of the wild torrents and ruinous stones, and unlightened even in their religion, except by the vague promise of some better things unknown, mingled with threatening, and obscured by an unspeakable horror — a smoke, as it were, of martyrdom, coiling up with the incense; and amidst the images of tortured bodies and lamenting spirits in hurtling flames, the very cross, for them, dashed more deeply than for others with gouts of blood."

The piece is over-wrought as well as unjust, with somewhat false emphasis, but how splendid in colour and majestic in language! "To bear the burden up the breathless mountain flank unmurmuringly" — is fine in spite of its obvious scansion and its profuse alliteration. "At their low death-beds a pale figure upon a cross, dying, also patiently" — will not scan, and it is charged with solemnity by soft "l," "d," and "p" repeated. How beautifully imitative is the line, "*as the bell tolls thin and far in the mountain air*" — **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, **u** — with ten monosyllables and one dissyllable! "*The crōss dashed more deeply with gōuts of blōōd.*" No one who has ever read that passage can pass along the Catholic valleys of the Swiss Alps without having it in his mind. Overcharged, and somewhat consciously and designedly *pictorial* as it is, it is a truly wonderful example of mastery over language and sympathetic insight.

We may turn now to a passage or two, in which perhaps Ruskin

is quite at his best. He has written few things finer, and indeed more exactly truthful, than his picture of the Campagna of Rome. This is in the Preface to the second edition of *Modern Painters*, 1843.

"Perhaps there is no more impressive scene on earth than the solitary extent of the Campagna of Rome under evening light. Let the reader imagine himself for the moment withdrawn from the sounds and motion of the living world, and sent forth alone into this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles beneath his foot, tread he never so lightly, for its substance is white, hollow, and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men. The long knotted grass waves and tosses feebly in the evening wind, and the shadows of its motion shake feverishly along the banks of ruin that lift themselves to the sunlight. Hillocks of mouldering earth heave around him, as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep. Scattered blocks of black stone, four-square remnants of mighty edifices, not one left upon another, lie upon them to keep them down. A dull purple poisonous haze stretches level along the desert, veiling its spectral wrecks of massy ruins, on whose rents the red light rests, like dying fire on defiled altars; the blue ridge of the Alban Mount lifts itself against a solemn space of green, clear, quiet sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds stand steadfastly along the promontories of the Apennines. From the plain to the mountains, the shattered aqueducts, pier beyond pier, melt into the darkness, like shadowy and countless troops of funeral mourners, passing from a nation's grave."

Here is a piece of pure description without passion or moralizing; the passage is broken, as we find in all good modern prose, into sentences of forty or fifty words. It is absolutely clear, literally true, an imaginative picture of one of the most impressive scenes in the world. All who know it, remember "the white, hollow, carious earth," like bone dust, "the long knotted grass," the "banks of ruin" and "hillocks of mouldering earth," the "dull purple poisonous haze," "the shattered aqueducts," like shadowy mourners at a nation's grave. The whole piece may be set beside Shelley's poem from the "*Euganean Hills*," and it produces a kindred impression. In Ruskin's prose, perhaps for the first time in literature, there are met the eye of the landscape painter and the voice of the lyric poet — and both are blended in perfection. It seems to me idle to debate, whether or not it is legitimate to describe in prose a magnificent scene, whether it be lawful to set down in prose the ideas which this scene kindles in an imaginative soul, whether it be permitted to such an artist to resort to any resource of grace or power which the English language can present.

This magnificent piece of word-painting is hardly surpassed by

anything in our literature. It cannot be said to carry alliteration to the point of affectation. But the reader may easily perceive by analysis how greatly its musical effect depends on profusion of subtle *consonance.* The "liquids" give grace: the broad ō and ā, and their diphthong sounds, give solemnity: the gutturals and double consonants give strength. "A **d**ull **p**urple **p**oisonous haze **st**retches **l**evel along the **d**esert"—"on whose **r**ents the **r**ed **l**ight **r**ests like **d**ying **f**ire on **d**efi**l**ed al**t**ars." Here in thirteen words are — five **r**, four **t**, four **d**, three **l**, — "**D**ark **cl**ouds **st**and **st**eadfastly"—"the pro**m**on**t**ories of the Apen**n**ines." The last clause is a favourite cadence of Ruskin's: its beautiful melody depends on a very subtle and complex scheme of *consonance.* "**Fr**om the **pl**ain to the **m**oun**t**ains, the **sh**a**tt**ered aque**d**ucts, **p**ier beyond **p**ier, **m**elt into the dar**kn**ess, like **sh**adowy and **c**oun**t**less troops of **f**uneral **m**ourners, **pāss**ing **fr**om a **nā**tion's **grāv**e." It is impossible to suppose that the harmonies of this "coda" are wholly accidental. They are the effect of a wonderful ear for tonality in speech, certainly unconscious, arising from passionate feeling more than from reflection. And Mr. Ruskin himself would no doubt be the first to deny that such a thought had ever crossed his mind; — perhaps he would himself denounce with characteristic vehemence any such vivisection applied to his living and palpitating words.

I turn now to a little book of his written in the middle of his life, at the height of his power, just before he entered on his second career of social philosopher and new evangelist. *The Harbours of England* was published nearly forty years ago in 1856 (*ætat.* 37), and it has now been happily reprinted in a cheap and smaller form, 1895. It is, I believe, as an education in art, as true, and as masterly as anything Ruskin ever wrote. But I wish now to treat it only from the point of view of English literature. And I make bold to say that no book in our language shows more varied resources over prose-writing, or an English more pure, more vigorous, more enchanting. It contains hardly any of those tirades with which the preacher loves to drench his hearers — torrents from the fountains of his ecstasy, or his indignation. The book is full of enthusiasm and of poetry: but it also contains a body of critical and expository matter — simple, lucid, graceful, incisive as anything ever set down by the hand of John Ruskin, or indeed of any other master of our English prose.

Every one remembers the striking sentence with which it opens

— a sentence, it may be, exaggerated in meaning, but how melodious, how impressive — "Of all things, living or lifeless [note the five **l**, the four **i**, in the first six words], upon this strange earth, there is but one which, having reached the mid-term of appointed human endurance on it, I still regard with unmitigated amazement." This object is the bow of a Boat, — "the blunt head of a common, bluff, undecked sea-boat lying aside in its furrow of beach sand. . . ."

"The sum of Navigation is in that. You may magnify it or decorate it as you will: you will not add to the wonder of it. Lengthen it into hatchet-like edge of iron, — strengthen it with complex tracery of ribs of oak, — carve it and gild it till a column of light moves beneath it on the sea, — you have made no more of it than it was at first. That rude simplicity of bent plank, that [? *should be* '*which*'] can breast its way through the death that is in the deep sea, has in it the soul of shipping. Beyond this, we may have more work, more men, more money; we cannot have more miracle."

The whole passage is loaded with imagery, with fancy, but hardly with conceits; it is wonderfully ingenious, impressive, suggestive, so that a boat is never quite the same thing to any one who has read this passage in early life. The ever-changing curves of the boat recall "the image of a sea-shell." "Every plank is a Fate, and has men's lives wreathed in the knots of it." This bow of the boat is "the gift of another world." Without it, we should be "chained to our rocks." The very nails that fasten the planks are "the rivets of the fellowship of the world." "Their iron does more than draw lightning out of heaven, it leads love round the earth." It is possible to call this fantastic, overwrought, lyrical: it is not possible to dispute its beauty, charm, and enthusiasm. It seems to me to carry imaginative prose exactly to that limit which to pass would cease to be fitting in prose; to carry fancy to the very verge of that which, if less sincere, less true, less pathetic, would justly be regarded as Euphuistic conceit.

And so this splendid hymn to the sea-boat rolls on to that piece which I take to be as fine and as true as anything ever said about the sea, even by our sea poets, Byron or Shelley: —

"Then, also, it is wonderful on account of the greatness of the enemy that it does battle with. To lift dead weight; to overcome length of languid space; to multiply or systematize a given force; this we may see done by the bar, or beam, or wheel, without wonder. But to war with that living fury of waters, to bare its breast, moment after moment, against the unwearied enmity of ocean, — the subtle, fitful, implacable smiting of the black waves, provok-

ing each other on, endlessly, all the infinite march of the Atlantic rolling on behind them to their help, and still to strike them back into a wreath of smoke and futile foam, and win its way against them, and keep its charge of life from them; — does any other soulless thing do as much as this?"

This noble paragraph has truth, originality, music, majesty, with that imitative power of sound which is usually thought to be possible only in poetry, and is very rarely successful even in poetry. Homer has often caught echoes of the sea in his majestic hexameters; Byron and Shelley occasionally recall it; as does Tennyson in its milder moods and calm rest. But I know no other English prose but this which, literally and nobly describing the look of a wild sea, suggests in the very rhythm of its cadence, and in the music of its roar, the tumultuous surging of the surf — "To war with that living fury of waters" — "the subtle, fitful, implacable smiting of the black waves," — "still to strike them back into a wreath of smoke and futile foam, and win its way against them." Here we seem not only to see before our eyes, but to hear with our ears, the crash of a stout boat plunging through a choppy sea off our southern coasts.

I would take this paragraph as the high-water mark of Ruskin's prose method. But there are scores and hundreds of passages in his books of equal power and perfection. This book on *The Harbours of England* is full of them. *O si sic omnia!*[1] Alas! a few pages further on, even of this admirable book which is so free from them, comes one of those ungovernable, over-laden, hypertrophied outbursts of his, which so much deform his earlier books. It is a splendid piece of conception: each phrase, each sentence, is beautiful; the images are appropriate and cognate; they flow naturally out of each other; and the whole has a most harmonious glow. But alas! as English prose, it is *impossible.* It has 255 words without a pause, and 26 intermediate signs of punctuation. No human breath could utter such a sentence: even the eye is bewildered; and, at last, the most docile and attentive reader sinks back, stunned and puzzled by such a torrent of phrases and such a wilderness of thoughts.[2]

He is speaking of the fisher-boat as the most venerable kind

[1] [Oh, if all were thus!]

[2] In the second volume of *Modern Painters*, p. 132, may be found a mammoth sentence, I suppose the most gigantic sentence in English prose. It has 619 words without a full stop, and 80 intermediate signs of punctuation, together with four clauses in brackets. It has been reprinted in the revised two volumes edition of 1883, where it fills four whole pages, i. 347–351.

of ship. He stands musing on the shingle between the black sides of two stranded fishing-boats. He watches "the clear heavy water-edge of ocean rising and falling close to their bows." And then he turns to the boats.

"And the dark flanks of the fishing-boats all aslope above, in their shining quietness, hot in the morning sun, rusty and seamed, with square patches of plank nailed over their rents; just rough enough to let the little flat-footed fisher-children haul or twist themselves up to the gunwales, and drop back again along some stray rope; just round enough to remind us, in their broad and gradual curves, of the sweep of the green surges they know so well, and of the hours when those old sides of seared timber, all ashine with the sea, plunge and dip into the deep green purity of the mounded waves more joyfully than a deer lies down among the grass of Spring, the soft white cloud of foam opening momentarily at the bows, and fading or flying high into the breeze where the sea-gulls toss and shriek, — the joy and beauty of it, all the while, so mingled with the sense of unfathomable danger, and the human effort and sorrow going on perpetually from age to age, waves rolling forever, and winds moaning forever, and faithful hearts trusting and sickening forever, and brave lives dashed away about the rattling beach like weeds forever; and still at the helm of every lonely boat, through starless night and hopeless dawn, His hand, who spread the fisher's net over the dust of the Sidonian palaces, and gave into the fisher's hand the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

It is a grand passage, ruined, I think, by excess of eagerness and sympathetic passion. Neither Shelley nor Keats ever flung his soul more keenly into an inert object and made it live to us, or rather, lived in it, felt its heart beat in his, and made his own its sorrows, its battles, its pride. So Tennyson gazing on the Yew which covers the loved grave cries out —

"I seem to fail from out my blood
And grow incorporate into thee."

So the poet sees the ship that brings his lost Arthur home, hears the noise about the keel, and the bell struck in the night. Thus Ruskin, watching the fisherman's boat upon the beach, sees in his mind's eye the past and the future of the boat, the swell of the green billows, and the roar of the ocean, and still at the helm, unseen but of him, an Almighty Hand guiding it in life and in death.

Had this noble vision been rehearsed with less passion, and in sober intervals of breathing, we could have borne it. The first twelve or fourteen lines, ending with "the deep green purity of the mounded waves," form a full picture. But, like a runaway horse, our poet plunges on where no human lungs and no ordinary

brain can keep up the giddy pace; and for seven or eight lines more we are pelted with new images till we feel like landsmen caught in a sudden squall. And then how grand are the last ten lines — "the human effort and sorrow going on perpetually from age to age" —! down to that daring antithesis of the fishermen of Tyre and the fisherman of St. Peter's! I cannot call it a conceit: but it would have been a conceit in the hands of any one less sincere, less passionate, not so perfectly saturated with Biblical imagery and language.

I have dwelt upon this passage as a typical example of Ruskin's magnificent power over the literary instrument, of his intense sympathy, of his vivid imagination, and alas! also of his ungovernable flux of ideas and of words. It is by reason of this wilful megalomania and plethoric habit, that we must hesitate to pronounce him the greatest master of English prose in our whole literature: but it is such mastery over language, such power to triumph over almost impossible conditions and difficulties, that compel us to regard him as one who could have become the noblest master of prose ever recorded, if he would only have set himself to curb his Pegasus from the first, and systematically to think of his reader's capacity for taking in, as well as of his own capacity for pouring forth, a torrent of glowing thoughts.

As a matter of fact, John Ruskin himself undertook to curb his Pegasus, and, like Turner or Beethoven, distinctly formed and practised "a second manner." That second manner coincides with the great change in his career, when he passed from critic of art to be social reformer and moral philosopher. The change was of course not absolute; but whereas, in the earlier half of his life, he had been a writer about Beauty and Art, who wove into his teaching lessons on social, moral, and religious problems, so he became, in the later part of his life, a worker about Society and Ethics, who filled his practical teaching with judgments about the beautiful in Nature and in Art. That second career dates from about the year 1860, when he began to write *Unto this Last*, which was finally published in 1862.

I myself judge that book to be not only the most original and creative work of John Ruskin, but the most original and creative work in pure literature since *Sartor Resartus*. But I am now concerning myself with form: and, as a matter of form, I would point to it as a work containing almost all that is noble in Ruskin's written prose, with hardly any, or very few, of his excesses and

mannerisms. It is true, that, pp. 147–8, we have a single sentence of 242 words and 52 intermediate stops before we come to the pause. But this is occasional; and the book as a whole is a masterpiece of pure, incisive, imaginative, lucid English. If one had to plead the cause of Ruskin before the Supreme Court in the Republic of Letters, one would rely on that book as a type of clearness, wit, eloquence, versatility, passion.

From the publication of *Unto this Last*, in 1862, John Ruskin distinctly adopted his later manner. Two volumes of selections from Ruskin's works were published in 1893 by George Allen, the compilation of some anonymous editor. They are of nearly equal size and of periods of equal length. The first series consists of extracts between 1843 and 1860 from *Modern Painters*, *Seven Lamps*, *Stones of Venice*, and minor lectures, articles, and letters anterior to 1860. The second series, 1860–1888, contains selections from *Unto this Last*, *Fors*, *Præterita*, and the lectures and treatises subsequent to 1860. Now, it will be seen that in the second series the style is more measured, more mature, more practical, more simple. It is rare to find the *purpurei panni* which abound in the first series, or the sentences of 200 words, or the ostentatious piling up of luscious imagery, and tumultuous fugues in oral symphony. The "first state" of a plate by Ruskin has far richer effects and more vivid light and shade than any example of his "second state."

Alas! the change came too late — too late in his life, too late in his career. When *Unto this Last* was finally published, John Ruskin was forty-three: he had already written the most elaborate and systematic of all his books — those on which his world-wide fame still rests. He had long past *il mezzo del cammin di nostra vita* [1] — and even the middle of his own long life: his energy, his health, his hopes, were not what they had been in his glorious youth and early manhood: his mission became consciously to raise men's moral standard in life, not to raise their sense of the beautiful in Art. The old mariner still held us with his glistening eye, and forced us to listen to his wondrous tale, but he spoke like a man whose voice shook with the memory of all that he had seen and known, over whom the deep waters had passed. I am one of those who know that John Ruskin has told us in his second life things more true and more important even than he told us in his first life. But yet I cannot bring myself to hold that, as

[1] [The middle of the highway of our life.]

magician of words, his later teaching has the mystery and the glory which hung round the honeyed lips of the "Oxford graduate."

If, then, John Ruskin be not in actual achievement the greatest master who ever wrote in English prose, it is only because he refused to chasten his passion and his imagination until the prime of life was past. A graceful poet and a great moralist said: —

> "Prune thou thy words; the thoughts control
> That o'er thee swell and throng: —
> They will condense within thy soul,
> And change to purpose strong."

This lesson Ruskin never learned until he was growing gray, and even now he only observes it so long as the spirit moves him, or rather does not move him too keenly. He has rarely suffered his thoughts to condense within his soul. Far from controlling them, he has spurred and lashed them into fury, so that they swell and throng over him and his readers, too often changing into satiety and impotence. Every other faculty of a great master of speech, except reserve, husbanding of resources, and patience, he possesses in measure most abundant — lucidity, purity, brilliance, elasticity, wit, fire, passion, imagination, majesty, with a mastery over all the melody of cadence that has no rival in the whole range of English literature.

X

CHARLES LAMB

(1775–1834)

ON THE TRAGEDIES OF SHAKESPEARE

Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation.

[Published in 1811 in Hunt's *Reflector*.]

TAKING a turn the other day in the Abbey, I was struck with the affected attitude of a figure, which I do not remember to have seen before, and which upon examination proved to be a whole-length of the celebrated Mr. Garrick. Though I would not go so far with some good Catholics abroad as to shut players altogether out of consecrated ground, yet I own I was not a little scandalized at the introduction of theatrical airs and gestures into a place set apart to remind us of the saddest realities. Going nearer, I found inscribed under this harlequin figure the following lines: —

> To paint fair Nature, by divine command,
> Her magic pencil in his glowing hand,
> A Shakespeare rose; then, to expand his fame
> Wide o'er this breathing world, a Garrick came.
> Though sunk in death the forms the Poet drew,
> The Actor's genius made them breathe anew;
> Though, like the bard himself, in night they lay,
> Immortal Garrick call'd them back to day:
> And till Eternity with power sublime
> Shall mark the mortal hour of hoary Time,
> Shakespeare and Garrick like twin-stars shall shine,
> And earth irradiate with a beam divine.

It would be an insult to my readers' understandings to attempt anything like a criticism on this farrago of false thoughts and nonsense. But the reflection it led me into was a kind of wonder, how from the days of the actor here celebrated to our own, it should have

been the fashion to compliment every performer in his turn, that has had the luck to please the town in any of the great characters of Shakespeare, with the notion of possessing a *mind congenial with the poet's:* how people should come thus unaccountably to confound the power of originating poetical images and conceptions with the faculty of being able to read or recite the same when put into words; [1] or what connection that absolute mastery over the heart and soul of man, which a great dramatic poet possesses, has with those low tricks upon the eye and ear, which a player by observing a few general effects, which some common passion, as grief, anger, &c., usually has upon the gestures and exterior, can so easily compass. To know the internal workings and movements of a great mind, of an Othello or a Hamlet for instance, the *when* and the *why* and the *how far* they should be moved; to what pitch a passion is becoming; to give the reins and to pull in the curb exactly at the moment when the drawing in or the slacking is most graceful; seems to demand a reach of intellect of a vastly different extent from that which is employed upon the bare imitation of the signs of these passions in the countenance or gesture, which signs are usually observed to be most lively and emphatic in the weaker sort of minds, and which signs can after all but indicate some passion, as I said before, anger, or grief, generally; but of the motives and grounds of the passion, wherein it differs from the same passion in low and vulgar natures, of these the actor can give no more idea by his face or gesture than the eye (without a metaphor) can speak, or the muscles utter intelligible sounds. But such is the instantaneous nature of the impressions which we take in at the eye and ear at a playhouse, compared with the slow apprehension oftentimes of the understanding in reading, that we are apt not only to sink the play-writer in the consideration which we pay to the actor, but even to identify in our minds in a perverse manner, the actor with the character which he represents. It is difficult for a frequent play-goer to disembarrass the idea of Hamlet from the person and voice of Mr. K. We speak of Lady Macbeth, while we are in reality thinking of Mrs. S. Nor is this confusion incidental alone

[1] It is observable that we fall into this confusion only in *dramatic* recitations. We never dream that the gentleman who reads Lucretius in public with great applause, is therefore a great poet and philosopher; nor do we find that Tom Davies, the bookseller, who is recorded to have recited the Paradise Lost better than any man in England in his day (though I cannot help thinking there must be some mistake in this tradition) was therefore, by his intimate friends, set upon a level with Milton.

to unlettered persons, who, not possessing the advantage of reading, are necessarily dependent upon the stage-player for all the pleasure which they can receive from the drama, and to whom the very idea of *what an author is* cannot be made comprehensible without some pain and perplexity of mind: the error is one from which persons otherwise not meanly lettered, find it almost impossible to extricate themselves.

Never let me be so ungrateful as to forget the very high degree of satisfaction which I received some years back from seeing for the first time a tragedy of Shakespeare performed, in which those two great performers sustained the principal parts. It seemed to embody and realize conceptions which had hitherto assumed no distinct shape. But dearly do we pay all our life after for this juvenile pleasure, this sense of distinctness. When the novelty is past, we find to our cost that, instead of realizing an idea, we have only materialized and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood. We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance.

How cruelly this operates upon the mind, to have its free conceptions thus cramped and pressed down to the measure of a strait-lacing actuality, may be judged from that delightful sensation of freshness, with which we turn to those plays of Shakespeare which have escaped being performed, and to those passages in the acting plays of the same writer which have happily been left out in the performance. How far the very custom of hearing anything *spouted*, withers and blows upon a fine passage, may be seen in those speeches from Henry the Fifth, &c., which are current in the mouths of school-boys from their being to be found in *Enfield Speakers*, and such kind of books. I confess myself utterly unable to appreciate that celebrated soliloquy in Hamlet, beginning "To be or not to be," or to tell whether it be good, bad, or indifferent, it has been so handled and pawed about by declamatory boys and men, and torn so inhumanly from its living place and principle of continuity in the play, till it is become to me a perfect dead member.

It may seem a paradox, but I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever. Their distinguishing excellence is a reason that they should be so. There is so much in them, which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye, and tone, and gesture, have nothing to do.

The glory of the scenic art is to personate passion, and the turns

of passion; and the more coarse and palpable the passion is, the more hold upon the eyes and ears of the spectators the performer obviously possesses. For this reason, scolding scenes, scenes where two persons talk themselves into a fit of fury, and then in a surprising manner talk themselves out of it again, have always been the most popular upon our stage. And the reason is plain, because the spectators are here most palpably appealed to, they are the proper judges in this war of words, they are the legitimate ring that should be formed round such "intellectual prize-fighters." Talking is the direct object of the imitation here. But in all the best dramas, and in Shakespeare above all, how obvious it is, that the form of *speaking*, whether it be in soliloquy or dialogue, is only a medium, and often a highly artificial one, for putting the reader or spectator into possession of that knowledge of the inner structure and workings of mind in a character, which he could otherwise never have arrived at *in that form of composition* by any gift short of intuition. We do here as we do with novels written in the *epistolary form*. How many improprieties, perfect solecisms in letter-writing, do we put up with in Clarissa and other books, for the sake of the delight which that form upon the whole gives us.

But the practice of stage representation reduces everything to a controversy of elocution. Every character, from the boisterous blasphemings of Bajazet to the shrinking timidity of womanhood, must play the orator. The love-dialogues of Romeo and Juliet, those silver-sweet sounds of lovers' tongues by night; the more intimate and sacred sweetness of nuptial colloquy between an Othello or a Posthumus with their married wives, all those delicacies which are so delightful in the reading, as when we read of those youthful dalliances in Paradise —

> ——————— As beseem'd
> Fair couple link'd in happy nuptial league,
> Alone:

by the inherent fault of stage representation, how are these things sullied and turned from their very nature by being exposed to a large assembly; when such speeches as Imogen addresses to her lord, come drawling out of the mouth of a hired actress, whose courtship, though nominally addressed to the personated Posthumus, is manifestly aimed at the spectators, who are to judge of her endearments and her returns of love.

The character of Hamlet is perhaps that by which, since the days of Betterton, a succession of popular performers have had the

greatest ambition to distinguish themselves. The length of the part may be one of their reasons. But for the character itself, we find it in a play, and therefore we judge it a fit subject of dramatic representation. The play itself abounds in maxims and reflections beyond any other, and therefore we consider it as a proper vehicle for conveying moral instruction. But Hamlet himself — what does he suffer meanwhile by being dragged forth as a public schoolmaster, to give lectures to the crowd! Why, nine parts in ten of what Hamlet does, are transactions between himself and his moral sense, they are the effusions of his solitary musings, which he retires to holes and corners and the most sequestered parts of the palace to pour forth; or rather, they are the silent meditations with which his bosom is bursting, reduced to *words* for the sake of the reader, who must else remain ignorant of what is passing there. These profound sorrows, these light-and-noise-abhorring ruminations, which the tongue scarce dares utter to deaf walls and chambers, how can they be represented by a gesticulating actor, who comes and mouths them out before an audience, making four hundred people his confidants at once? I say not that it is the fault of the actor so to do; he must pronounce them *ore rotundo*,[1] he must accompany them with his eye, he must insinuate them into his auditory by some trick of eye, tone, or gesture, or he fails. *He must be thinking all the while of his appearance, because he knows that all the while the spectators are judging of it.* And this is the way to represent the shy, negligent, retiring Hamlet.

It is true that there is no other mode of conveying a vast quantity of thought and feeling to a great portion of the audience, who otherwise would never learn it for themselves by reading, and the intellectual acquisition gained this way may, for aught I know, be inestimable; but I am not arguing that Hamlet should not be acted, but how much Hamlet is made another thing by being acted. I have heard much of the wonders which Garrick performed in this part; but as I never saw him, I must have leave to doubt whether the representation of such a character came within the province of his art. Those who tell me of him, speak of his eye, of the magic of his eye, and of his commanding voice: physical properties, vastly desirable in an actor, and without which he can never insinuate meaning into an auditory, — but what have they to do with Hamlet? what have they to do with intellect? In fact, the things aimed at in theatrical representation, are to arrest the spectator's eye

[1] [With full voice.]

upon the form and the gesture, and so to gain a more favourable hearing to what is spoken: it is not what the character is, but how he looks; not what he says, but how he speaks it. I see no reason to think that if the play of Hamlet were written over again by some such writer as Banks or Lillo, retaining the process of the story, but totally omitting all the poetry of it, all the divine features of Shakespeare, his stupendous intellect; and only taking care to give us enough of passionate dialogue, which Banks or Lillo were never at a loss to furnish; I see not how the effect could be much different upon an audience, nor how the actor has it in his power to represent Shakespeare to us differently from his representation of Banks or Lillo. Hamlet would still be a youthful accomplished prince, and must be gracefully personated; he might be puzzled in his mind, wavering in his conduct, seemingly cruel to Ophelia, he might see a ghost, and start at it, and address it kindly when he found it to be his father; all this in the poorest and most homely language of the servilest creeper after nature that ever consulted the palate of an audience; without troubling Shakespeare for the matter: and I see not but there would be room for all the power which an actor has, to display itself. All the passions and changes of passion might remain; for those are much less difficult to write or act than is thought; it is a trick easy to be attained, it is but rising or falling a note or two in the voice, a whisper with a significant foreboding look to announce its approach, and so contagious the counterfeit appearance of any emotion is, that let the words be what they will, the look and tone shall carry it off and make it pass for deep skill in the passions.

It is common for people to talk of Shakespeare's plays being *so natural*, that everybody can understand him. They are natural indeed, they are grounded deep in nature, so deep that the depth of them lies out of the reach of most of us. You shall hear the same persons say that George Barnwell is very natural, and Othello is very natural, that they are both very deep; and to them they are the same kind of thing. At the one they sit and shed tears, because a good sort of young man is tempted by a naughty woman to commit *a trifling peccadillo*, the murder of an uncle or so,[1]

[1] If this note could hope to meet the eye of any of the Managers, I would entreat and beg of them, in the name of both the Galleries, that this insult upon the morality of the common people of London should cease to be eternally repeated in the holiday weeks. Why are the 'Prentices of this famous and well-governed city, instead of an amusement, to be treated over and over again with a nauseous sermon of George Barnwell? Why *at the end of their vistas* are we to place the *gallows?*

that is all, and so comes to an untimely end, which is *so moving;* and at the other, because a blackamoor in a fit of jealousy kills his innocent white wife: and the odds are that ninety-nine out of a hundred would willingly behold the same catastrophe happen to both the heroes, and have thought the rope more due to Othello than to Barnwell. For of the texture of Othello's mind, the inward construction marvellously laid open with all its strengths and weaknesses, its heroic confidences and its human misgivings, its agonies of hate springing from the depths of love, they see no more than the spectators at a cheaper rate, who pay their pennies apiece to look through the man's telescope in Leicester Fields, see into the inward plot and topography of the moon. Some dim thing or other they see, they see an actor personating a passion, of grief, or anger, for instance, and they recognize it as a copy of the usual external effects of such passions; or at least as being true to *that symbol of the emotion which passes current at the theatre for it*, for it is often no more than that: but of the grounds of the passion, its correspondence to a great or heroic nature, which is the only worthy object of tragedy, — that common auditors know anything of this, or can have any such notions dinned into them by the mere strength of an actor's lungs, — that apprehensions foreign to them should be thus infused into them by storm, I can neither believe, nor understand how it can be possible.

We talk of Shakespeare's admirable observation of life, when we should feel, that not from a petty inquisition into those cheap and everyday characters which surrounded him, as they surround us, but from his own mind, which was, to borrow a phrase of Ben Jonson's, the very "sphere of humanity," he fetched those images of virtue and of knowledge, of which every one of us recognizing a part, think we comprehend in our natures the whole; and oftentimes mistake the powers which he positively creates in us, for nothing more than indigenous faculties of our own minds, which only waited the application of corresponding virtues in him to return a full and clear echo of the same.

To return to Hamlet. — Among the distinguishing features of that wonderful character, one of the most interesting (yet painful)

Were I an uncle, I should not much like a nephew of mine to have such an example placed before his eyes. It is really making uncle-murder too trivial to exhibit it as done upon such slight motives; — it is attributing too much to such characters as Millwood; it is putting things into the heads of good young men, which they would never otherwise have dreamed of. Uncles that think anything of their lives, should fairly petition the Chamberlain against it.

is that soreness of mind which makes him treat the intrusions of Polonius with harshness, and that asperity which he puts on in his interviews with Ophelia. These tokens of an unhinged mind (if they be not mixed in the latter case with a profound artifice of love, to alienate Ophelia by affected discourtesies, so to prepare her mind for the breaking off of that loving intercourse, which can no longer find a place amidst business so serious as that which he has to do) are parts of his character, which to reconcile with our admiration of Hamlet, the most patient consideration of his situation is no more than necessary; they are what we *forgive afterwards*, and explain by the whole of his character, but *at the time* they are harsh and unpleasant. Yet such is the actor's necessity of giving strong blows to the audience, that I have never seen a player in this character, who did not exaggerate and strain to the utmost these ambiguous features, — these temporary deformities in the character. They make him express a vulgar scorn at Polonius which utterly degrades his gentility, and which no explanation can render palatable; they make him show contempt, and curl up the nose at Ophelia's father, — contempt in its very grossest and most hateful form; but they get applause by it: it is natural, people say; that is, the words are scornful, and the actor expresses scorn, and that they can judge of: but why so much scorn, and of that sort, they never think of asking.

So to Ophelia. — All the Hamlets that I have ever seen, rant and rave at her as if she had committed some great crime, and the audience are highly pleased, because the words of the part are satirical, and they are enforced by the strongest expression of satirical indignation of which the face and voice are capable. But then, whether Hamlet is likely to have put on such brutal appearances to a lady whom he loved so dearly, is never thought on. The truth is, that in all such deep affections as had subsisted between Hamlet and Ophelia, there is a stock of *supererogatory love* (if I may venture to use the expression), which in any great grief of heart, especially where that which preys upon the mind cannot be communicated, confers a kind of indulgence upon the grieved party to express itself, even to its heart's dearest object, in the language of a temporary alienation; but it is not alienation, it is a distraction purely, and so it always makes itself to be felt by that object: it is not anger, but grief assuming the appearance of anger, — love awkwardly counterfeiting hate, as sweet countenances when they try to frown: but such sternness and fierce disgust as Hamlet is made to show, is

no counterfeit, but the real face of absolute aversion, — of irreconcilable alienation. It may be said he puts on the madman; but then he should only so far put on this counterfeit lunacy as his own real distraction will give him leave; that is, incompletely, imperfectly; not in that confirmed, practised way, like a master of his art, or as Dame Quickly would say, "like one of those harlotry players."

I mean no disrespect to any actor, but the sort of pleasure which Shakespeare's plays give in the acting seems to me not at all to differ from that which the audience receive from those of other writers; and, *they being in themselves essentially so different from all others*, I must conclude that there is something in the nature of acting which levels all distinctions. And in fact, who does not speak indifferently of the Gamester and of Macbeth as fine stage performances, and praise the Mrs. Beverley in the same way as the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. S.? Belvidera, and Calista, and Isabella, and Euphrasia, are they less liked than Imogen, or than Juliet, or than Desdemona? Are they not spoken of and remembered in the same way? Is not the female performer as great (as they call it) in one as in the other? Did not Garrick shine, and was he not ambitious of shining in every drawling tragedy that his wretched day produced, — the productions of the Hills and the Murphys and the Browns, — and shall he have that honour to dwell in our minds forever as an inseparable concomitant with Shakespeare? A kindred mind! O who can read that affecting sonnet of Shakespeare which alludes to his profession as a player: —

> Oh for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
> The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
> That did not better for my life provide
> Than public means which public manners breeds —
> Thence comes it that my name receives a brand;
> And almost thence my nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand ——

Or that other confession: —

> Alas! 'tis true, I have gone here and there,
> And made myself a motley to the view,
> Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear —

Who can read these instances of jealous self-watchfulness in our sweet Shakespeare, and dream of any congeniality between him and one that, by every tradition of him, appears to have been as mere a player as ever existed; to have had his mind tainted with the

lowest players' vices, — envy and jealousy, and miserable cravings after applause; one who in the exercise of his profession was jealous even of the women-performers that stood in his way; a manager full of managerial tricks and stratagems and finesse: that any resemblance should be dreamed of between him and Shakespeare, — Shakespeare who, in the plenitude and consciousness of his own powers, could with that noble modesty, which we can neither imitate nor appreciate, express himself thus of his own sense of his own defects: —

> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd;
> Desiring *this man's art, and that man's scope.*

I am almost disposed to deny to Garrick the merit of being an admirer of Shakespeare. A true lover of his excellencies he certainly was not; for would any true lover of them have admitted into his matchless scenes such ribald trash as Tate and Cibber, and the rest of them, that

> With their darkness durst affront his light,

have foisted into the acting plays of Shakespeare? I believe it impossible that he could have had a proper reverence for Shakespeare, and have condescended to go through that interpolated scene in Richard the Third, in which Richard tries to break his wife's heart by telling her he loves another woman, and says, "if she survives this she is immortal." Yet I doubt not he delivered this vulgar stuff with as much anxiety of emphasis as any of the genuine parts: and for acting, it is as well calculated as any. But we have seen the part of Richard lately produce great fame to an actor by his manner of playing it, and it lets us into the secret of acting, and of popular judgments of Shakespeare derived from acting. Not one of the spectators who have witnessed Mr. C.'s exertions in that part, but has come away with a proper conviction that Richard is a very wicked man, and kills little children in their beds, with something like the pleasure which the giants and ogres in children's books are represented to have taken in that practice; moreover, that he is very close and shrewd and devilish cunning, for you could see that by his eye.

But is in fact this the impression we have in reading the Richard of Shakespeare? Do we feel anything like disgust, as we do at that butcher-like representation of him that passes for him on the stage? A horror at his crimes blends with the effect which we feel,

but how is it qualified, how is it carried off, by the rich intellect which he displays, his resources, his wit, his buoyant spirits, his vast knowledge and insight into characters, the poetry of his part — not an atom of all which is made perceivable in Mr. C.'s way of acting it. Nothing but his crimes, his actions, is visible; they are prominent and staring; the murderer stands out, but where is the lofty genius, the man of vast capacity, — the profound, the witty, accomplished Richard?

The truth is, the Characters of Shakespeare are so much the objects of meditation rather than of interest or curiosity as to their actions, that while we are reading any of his great criminal characters, — Macbeth, Richard, even Iago, — we think not so much of the crimes which they commit, as of the ambition, the aspiring spirit, the intellectual activity, which prompts them to overleap those moral fences. Barnwell is a wretched murderer; there is a certain fitness between his neck and the rope; he is the legitimate heir to the gallows; nobody who thinks at all can think of any alleviating circumstances in his case to make him a fit object of mercy. Or to take an instance from the higher tragedy, what else but a mere assassin is Glenalvon! Do we think of anything but of the crime which he commits, and the rack which he deserves? That is all which we really think about him. Whereas in corresponding characters in Shakespeare so little do the actions comparatively affect us, that while the impulses, the inner mind in all its perverted greatness, solely seems real and is exclusively attended to, the crime is comparatively nothing. But when we see these things represented, the acts which they do are comparatively everything, their impulses nothing. The state of sublime emotion into which we are elevated by those images of night and horror which Macbeth is made to utter, that solemn prelude with which he entertains the time till the bell shall strike which is to call him to murder Duncan, — when we no longer read it in a book, when we have given up that vantage-ground of abstraction which reading possesses over seeing, and come to see a man in his bodily shape before our eyes actually preparing to commit a murder, if the acting be true and impressive, as I have witnessed it in Mr. K.'s performance of that part, the painful anxiety about the act, the natural longing to prevent it while it yet seems unperpetrated, the too close pressing semblance of reality, give a pain and an uneasiness which totally destroy all the delight which the words in the book convey, where the deed doing never presses upon us with the painful sense of pres-

ence: it rather seems to belong to history, — to something past and inevitable, if it has anything to do with time at all. The sublime images, the poetry alone, is that which is present to our minds in the reading.

So to see Lear acted, — to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear: they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear, — we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind. What have looks, or tones, to do with that sublime identification of his age with that of the *heavens themselves*, when in his reproaches to them for conniving at the injustice of his children, he reminds them that "they themselves are old"? What gesture shall we appropriate to this? What has the voice or the eye to do with such things? But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it show: it is too hard and stony; it must have love-scenes, and a happy ending. It is not enough that Cordelia is a daughter, she must shine as a lover too. Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the showmen of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily. A happy ending! — as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through, — the flaying of his

feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world's burden after, why all this putter and preparation, — why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station, — as if at his years, and with his experience, anything was left but to die.

Lear is essentially impossible to be represented on a stage. But how many dramatic personages are there in Shakespeare, which though more tractable and feasible (if I may so speak) than Lear, yet from some circumstance, some adjunct to their character, are improper to be shown to our bodily eye. Othello, for instance. Nothing can be more soothing, more flattering to the nobler parts of our natures, than to read of a young Venetian lady of highest extraction, through the force of love and from a sense of merit in him whom she loved, laying aside every consideration of kindred, and country, and colour, and wedding with a *coal-black Moor* — (for such he is represented, in the imperfect state of knowledge respecting foreign countries in those days, compared with our own, or in compliance with popular notions, though the Moors are now well enough known to be by many shades less unworthy of a white woman's fancy) — it is the perfect triumph of virtue over accidents, of the imagination over the senses. She sees Othello's colour in his mind. But upon the stage, when the imagination is no longer the ruling faculty, but we are left to our poor unassisted senses, I appeal to every one that has seen Othello played, whether he did not, on the contrary, sink Othello's mind in his colour; whether he did not find something extremely revolting in the courtship and wedded caresses of Othello and Desdemona; and whether the actual sight of the thing did not overweigh all that beautiful compromise which we make in reading; — and the reason it should do so is obvious, because there is just so much reality presented to our senses as to give a perception of disagreement, with not enough of belief in the internal motives, — all that which is unseen, — to overpower and reconcile the first and obvious prejudices.[1] What we see upon a stage is body and bodily action;

[1] The error of supposing that because Othello's colour does not offend us in the reading, it should also not offend us in the seeing, is just such a fallacy as supposing that an Adam and Eve in a picture shall affect us just as they do in the

what we are conscious of in reading is almost exclusively the mind, and its movements: and this I think may sufficiently account for the very different sort of delight with which the same play so often affects us in the reading and the seeing.

It requires little reflection to perceive, that if those characters in Shakespeare which are within the precincts of nature, have yet something in them which appeals too exclusively to the imagination, to admit of their being made objects to the senses without suffering a change and a diminution, — that still stronger the objection must lie against representing another line of characters, which Shakespeare has introduced to give a wildness and a supernatural elevation to his scenes, as if to remove them still farther from that assimilation to common life in which their excellence is vulgarly supposed to consist. When we read the incantations of those terrible beings the Witches in Macbeth, though some of the ingredients of their hellish composition savour of the grotesque, yet is the effect upon us other than the most serious and appalling that can be imagined? Do we not feel spell-bound as Macbeth was? Can any mirth accompany a sense of their presence? We might as well laugh under a consciousness of the principle of Evil himself being truly and really present with us. But attempt to bring these beings on to a stage, and you turn them instantly into so many old women, that men and children are to laugh at. Contrary to the old saying, that "seeing is believing," the sight actually destroys the faith: and the mirth in which we indulge at their expense, when we see these creatures upon a stage, seems to be a sort of indemnification which we make to ourselves for the terror which they put us in when reading made them an object of belief, — when we surrendered up our reason to the poet, as children to their nurses and their elders; and we laugh at our fears, as children who thought they saw something in the dark, triumph when the bringing in of a candle discovers the vanity of their fears. For this exposure of supernatural agents upon a stage is truly bringing in a candle to expose their own delusiveness. It is the solitary taper and the book that generates a faith in these terrors: a ghost by chandelier

poem. But in the poem we for a while have Paradisaical senses given us, which vanish when we see a man and his wife without clothes in the picture. The painters themselves feel this, as is apparent by the awkward shifts they have recourse to, to make them look not quite naked; by a sort of prophetic anachronism antedating the invention of fig-leaves. So in the reading of the play, we see with Desdemona's eyes; in the seeing of it, we are forced to look with our own.

light, and in good company, deceives no spectators, — a ghost that can be measured by the eye, and his human dimensions made out at leisure. The sight of a well-lighted house, and a well-dressed audience, shall arm the most nervous child against any apprehensions: as Tom Brown says of the impenetrable skin of Achilles with his impenetrable armour over it, "Bully Dawson would have fought the devil with such advantages."

Much has been said, and deservedly, in reprobation of the vile mixture which Dryden has thrown into the Tempest: doubtless without some such vicious alloy, the impure ears of that age would never have sate out to hear so much innocence of love as is contained in the sweet courtship of Ferdinand and Miranda. But is the Tempest of Shakespeare at all a subject for stage representation? It is one thing to read of an enchanter, and to believe the wondrous tale while we are reading it; but to have a conjurer brought before us in his conjuring-gown, with his spirits about him, which none but himself and some hundred of favoured spectators before the curtain are supposed to see, involves such a quantity of the *hateful incredible*, that all our reverence for the author cannot hinder us from perceiving such gross attempts upon the senses to be in the highest degree childish and inefficient. Spirits and fairies cannot be represented, they cannot even be painted, — they can only be believed. But the elaborate and anxious provision of scenery, which the luxury of the age demands, in these cases works a quite contrary effect to what is intended. That which in comedy, or plays of familiar life, adds so much to the life of the imitation, in plays which appeal to the higher faculties, positively destroys the illusion which it is introduced to aid. A parlour or a drawing-room, — a library opening into a garden, — a garden with an alcove in it, — a street, or the piazza of Covent Garden, does well enough in a scene; we are content to give as much credit to it as it demands; or rather, we think little about it, — it is little more than reading at the top of a page, "Scene, a Garden;" we do not imagine ourselves there, but we readily admit the imitation of familiar objects. But to think by the help of painted trees and caverns, which we know to be painted, to transport our minds to Prospero, and his island and his lonely cell;[1] or by the aid of a fiddle dexterously thrown

[1] It will be said these things are done in pictures. But pictures and scenes are very different things. Painting is a world of itself, but in scene-painting there is the attempt to deceive; and there is the discordancy, never to be got over, between painted scenes and real people.

in, in an interval of speaking, to make us believe that we hear those supernatural noises of which the isle was full: — the Orrery Lecturer at the Haymarket might as well hope, by his musical glasses cleverly stationed out of sight behind his apparatus, to make us believe that we do indeed hear the crystal spheres ring out that chime, which if it were to inwrap our fancy long, Milton thinks,

> Time would run back and fetch the age of gold,
> And speckled vanity
> Would sicken soon and die,
> And leprous Sin would melt from earthly mould;
> Yea Hell itself would pass away,
> And leave its dolorous mansions to the peering day.

The Garden of Eden, with our first parents in it, is not more impossible to be shown on a stage, than the Enchanted Isle, with its no less interesting and innocent first settlers.

The subject of Scenery is closely connected with that of the Dresses, which are so anxiously attended to on our stage. I remember the last time I saw Macbeth played, the discrepancy I felt at the changes of garment which he varied, — the shiftings and re-shiftings, like a Romish priest at mass. The luxury of stage-improvements, and the importunity of the public eye, require this. The coronation robe of the Scottish monarch was fairly a counterpart to that which our King wears when he goes to the Parliament-house, — just so full and cumbersome, and set out with ermine and pearls. And if things must be represented, I see not what to find fault with in this. But in reading, what robe are we conscious of? Some dim images of royalty — a crown and sceptre, may float before our eyes, but who shall describe the fashion of it? Do we see in our mind's eye what Webb or any other robe-maker could pattern? This is the inevitable consequence of imitating everything, to make all things natural. Whereas the reading of a tragedy is a fine abstraction. It presents to the fancy just so much of external appearances as to make us feel that we are among flesh and blood, while by far the greater and better part of our imagination is employed upon the thoughts and internal machinery of the character. But in acting, scenery, dress, the most contemptible things, call upon us to judge of their naturalness.

Perhaps it would be no bad similitude, to liken the pleasure which we take in seeing one of these fine plays acted, compared

with that quiet delight which we find in the reading of it, to the different feelings with which a reviewer, and a man that is not a reviewer, reads a fine poem. The accursed critical habit, — the being called upon to judge and pronounce, must make it quite a different thing to the former. In seeing these plays acted, we are affected just as judges. When Hamlet compares the two pictures of Gertrude's first and second husband, who wants to see the pictures? But in the acting, a miniature must be lugged out; which we know not to be the picture, but only to show how finely a miniature may be represented. This showing of everything, levels all things: it makes tricks, bows, and curtseys, of importance. Mrs. S. never got more fame by anything than by the manner in which she dismisses the guests in the banquet-scene in Macbeth: it is as much remembered as any of her thrilling tones or impressive looks. But does such a trifle as this enter into the imaginations of the reader of that wild and wonderful scene? Does not the mind dismiss the feasters as rapidly as it can? Does it care about the gracefulness of the doing it? But by acting, and judging of acting, all these non-essentials are raised into an importance, injurious to the main interest of the play.

I have confined my observations to the tragic parts of Shakespeare. It would be no very difficult task to extend the inquiry to his comedies; and to show why Falstaff, Shallow, Sir Hugh Evans, and the rest are equally incompatible with stage representation. The length to which this Essay has run, will make it, I am afraid, sufficiently distasteful to the Amateurs of the Theatre, without going any deeper into the subject at present.

XI

HENRY JAMES

(1843)

THE ART OF FICTION

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I SHOULD not have affixed so comprehensive a title to these few remarks, necessarily wanting in any completeness upon a subject the full consideration of which would carry us far, did I not seem to discover a pretext for my temerity in the interesting pamphlet lately published under this name by Mr. Walter Besant. Mr. Besant's lecture at the Royal Institution — the original form of his pamphlet — appears to indicate that many persons are interested in the art of fiction, and are not indifferent to such remarks, as those who practise it may attempt to make about it. I am therefore anxious not to lose the benefit of this favourable association, and to edge in a few words under cover of the attention which Mr. Besant is sure to have excited. There is something very encouraging in his having put into form certain of his ideas on the mystery of story-telling.

It is a proof of life and curiosity — curiosity on the part of the brotherhood of novelists as well as on the part of their readers. Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call *discutable*. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it — of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison. I do not say it was necessarily the worse for that: it would take much more courage than I possess to intimate that the form of the novel as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it had any taint of incompleteness. It was,

however, *naïf* (if I may help myself out with another French word); and evidently if it be destined to suffer in any way for having lost its *naïveté* it has now an idea of making sure of the corresponding advantages. During the period I have alluded to there was a comfortable, good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it. But within a year or two, for some reason or other, there have been signs of returning animation — the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened. Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints; and there is a presumption that those times when no one has anything particular to say about it, and has no reason to give for practice or preference, though they may be times of honour, are not times of development — are times, possibly even, a little of dulness. The successful application of any art is a delightful spectacle, but the theory too is interesting; and though there is a great deal of the latter without the former I suspect there has never been a genuine success that has not had a latent core of conviction. Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilizing when they are frank and sincere. Mr. Besant has set an excellent example in saying what he thinks, for his part, about the way in which fiction should be written, as well as about the way in which it should be published; for his view of the "art," carried on into an appendix, covers that too. Other labourers in the same field will doubtless take up the argument, they will give it the light of their experience, and the effect will surely be to make our interest in the novel a little more what it had for some time threatened to fail to be — a serious, active, inquiring interest, under protection of which this delightful study may, in moments of confidence, venture to say a little more what it thinks of itself.

It must take itself seriously for the public to take it so. The old superstition about fiction being "wicked" has doubtless died out in England; but the spirit of it lingers in a certain oblique regard directed toward any story which does not more or less admit that it is only a joke. Even the most jocular novel feels in some degree the weight of the proscription that was formerly directed against literary levity: the jocularity does not always succeed in passing for orthodoxy. It is still expected, though perhaps people are ashamed to say it, that a production which

is after all only a "make-believe" (for what else is a "story?") shall be in some degree apologetic — shall renounce the pretension of attempting really to represent life. This, of course, any sensible, wide-awake story declines to do, for it quickly perceives that the tolerance granted to it on such a condition is only an attempt to stifle it disguised in the form of generosity. The old evangelical hostility to the novel, which was as explicit as it was narrow, and which regarded it as little less favourable to our immortal part than a stage-play, was in reality far less insulting. The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt, the same attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass. It is not expected of the picture that it will make itself humble in order to be forgiven; and the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete. Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle), is the same, their success is the same. They may learn from each other, they may explain and sustain each other. Their cause is the same, and the honour of one is the honour of another. The Mahometans think a picture an unholy thing, but it is a long time since any Christian did, and it is therefore the more odd that in the Christian mind the traces (dissimulated though they may be) of a suspicion of the sister art should linger to this day. The only effectual way to lay it to rest is to emphasize the analogy to which I just alluded — to insist on the fact that as the picture is reality, so the novel is history. That is the only general description (which does it justice) that we may give of the novel. But history also is allowed to represent life; it is not, any more than painting, expected to apologize. The subject-matter of fiction is stored up likewise in documents and records, and if it will not give itself away, as they say in California, it must speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian. Certain accomplished novelists have a habit of giving themselves away which must often bring tears to the eyes of people who take their fiction seriously. I was lately struck, in reading over many pages of Anthony Trollope, with his want of discretion in this particular. In a digression, a parenthesis or an aside, he concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only "making believe." He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such

a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime; it is what I mean by the attitude of apology, and it shocks me every whit as much in Trollope as it would have shocked me in Gibbon or Macaulay. It implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth (the truth, of course I mean, that he assumes, the premises that we must grant him, whatever they may be), than the historian, and in doing so it deprives him at a stroke of all his standing-room. To represent and illustrate the past, the actions of men, is the task of either writer, and the only difference that I can see is, in proportion as he succeeds, to the honour of the novelist, consisting as it does in his having more difficulty in collecting his evidence, which is so far from being purely literary. It seems to me to give him a great character, the fact that he has at once so much in common with the philosopher and the painter; this double analogy is a magnificent heritage.

It is of all this evidently that Mr. Besant is full when he insists upon the fact that fiction is one of the *fine* arts, deserving in its turn of all the honours and emoluments that have hitherto been reserved for the successful profession of music, poetry, painting, architecture. It is impossible to insist too much on so important a truth, and the place that Mr. Besant demands for the work of the novelist may be represented, a trifle less abstractly, by saying that he demands not only that it shall be reputed artistic, but that it shall be reputed very artistic indeed. It is excellent that he should have struck this note, for his doing so indicates that there was need of it, that his proposition may be to many people a novelty. One rubs one's eyes at the thought; but the rest of Mr. Besant's essay confirms the revelation. I suspect in truth that it would be possible to confirm it still further, and that one would not be far wrong in saying that in addition to the people to whom it has never occurred that a novel ought to be artistic, there are a great many others who, if this principle were urged upon them, would be filled with an indefinable mistrust. They would find it difficult to explain their repugnance, but it would operate strongly to put them on their guard. "Art," in our Protestant communities, where so many things have got so strangely twisted about, is supposed in certain circles to have some vaguely injurious effect upon those who make it an important consideration, who let it weigh in the balance. It is assumed to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction. When it is embodied in the work of the painter (the sculptor is another affair!) you know what it is:

it stands there before you, in the honesty of pink and green and a gilt frame; you can see the worst of it at a glance, and you can be on your guard. But when it is introduced into literature it becomes more insidious — there is danger of its hurting you before you know it. Literature should be either instructive or amusing, and there is in many minds an impression that these artistic preoccupations, the search for form, contribute to neither end, interfere indeed with both. They are too frivolous to be edifying, and too serious to be diverting; and they are moreover priggish and paradoxical and superfluous. That, I think, represents the manner in which the latent thought of many people who read novels as an exercise in skipping would explain itself if it were to become articulate. They would argue, of course, that a novel ought to be "good," but they would interpret this term in a fashion of their own, which indeed would vary considerably from one critic to another. One would say that being good means representing virtuous and aspiring characters, placed in prominent positions; another would say that it depends on a "happy ending," on a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks. Another still would say that it means being full of incident and movement, so that we shall wish to jump ahead, to see who was the mysterious stranger, and if the stolen will was ever found, and shall not be distracted from this pleasure by any tiresome analysis or "description." But they would all agree that the "artistic" idea would spoil some of their fun. One would hold it accountable for all the description, another would see it revealed in the absence of sympathy. Its hostility to a happy ending would be evident, and it might even in some cases render any ending at all impossible. The "ending" of a novel is, for many persons, like that of a good dinner, a course of dessert and ices, and the artist in fiction is regarded as a sort of meddlesome doctor who forbids agreeable aftertastes. It is therefore true that this conception of Mr. Besant's of the novel as a superior form encounters not only a negative but a positive indifference. It matters little that as a work of art it should really be as little or as much of its essence to supply happy endings, sympathetic characters, and an objective tone, as if it were a work of mechanics: the association of ideas, however incongruous, might easily be too much for it if an eloquent voice were not sometimes raised to call attention to the fact that it is at once as free and as serious a branch of literature as any other.

Certainly this might sometimes be doubted in presence of the enormous number of works of fiction that appeal to the credulity of our generation, for it might easily seem that there could be no great character in a commodity so quickly and easily produced. It must be admitted that good novels are much compromised by bad ones, and that the field at large suffers discredit from overcrowding. I think, however, that this injury is only superficial, and that the superabundance of written fiction proves nothing against the principle itself. It has been vulgarized, like all other kinds of literature, like everything else to-day, and it has proved more than some kinds accessible to vulgarization. But there is as much difference as there ever was between a good novel and a bad one: the bad is swept with all the daubed canvases and spoiled marble into some unvisited limbo, or infinite rubbish-yard beneath the back-windows of the world, and the good subsists and emits its light and stimulates our desire for perfection. As I shall take the liberty of making but a single criticism of Mr. Besant, whose tone is so full of the love of his art, I may as well have done with it at once. He seems to me to mistake in attempting to say so definitely beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel will be. To indicate the danger of such an error as that has been the purpose of these few pages; to suggest that certain traditions on the subject, applied *a priori*, have already had much to answer for, and that the good health of an art which undertakes so immediately to reproduce life must demand that it be perfectly free. It lives upon exercise, and the very meaning of exercise is freedom. The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting. That general responsibility rests upon it, but it is the only one I can think of. The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result (of interesting us) strike me as innumerable, and such as can only suffer from being marked out or fenced in by prescription. They are as various as the temperament of man, and they are successful in proportion as they reveal a particular mind, different from others. A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most

curious about. The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact: then the author's choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances. Then in a word we can enjoy one of the most charming of pleasures, we can estimate quality, we can apply the test of execution. The execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that. The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant — no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes. Here it is especially that he works, step by step, like his brother of the brush, of whom we may always say that he has painted his picture in a manner best known to himself. His manner is his secret, not necessarily a jealous one. He cannot disclose it as a general thing if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others. I say this with a due recollection of having insisted on the community of method of the artist who paints a picture and the artist who writes a novel. The painter *is* able to teach the rudiments of his practice, and it is possible, from the study of good work (granted the aptitude), both to learn how to paint and to learn how to write. Yet it remains true, without injury to the *rapprochement*, that the literary artist would be obliged to say to his pupil much more than the other, "Ah, well, you must do it as you can!" It is a question of degree, a matter of delicacy. If there are exact sciences, there are also exact arts, and the grammar of painting is so much more definite that it makes the difference.

I ought to add, however, that if Mr. Besant says at the beginning of his essay that the "laws of fiction may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion," he mitigates what might appear to be an extravagance by applying his remark to "general" laws, and by expressing most of these rules in a manner with which it would certainly be unaccommodating to disagree. That the novelist must write from his experience, that his "characters must be real and such as might be met with in actual life;" that "a young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life," and "a writer whose friends and personal experiences belong to the lower middle-class should carefully avoid introducing his characters into society;" that one should enter one's notes in a common-place book; that one's figures should be

clear in outline; that making them clear by some trick of speech or of carriage is a bad method, and "describing them at length" is a worse one; that English Fiction should have a "conscious moral purpose;" that "it is almost impossible to estimate too highly the value of careful workmanship — that is, of style;" that "the most important point of all is the story," that "the story is everything": these are principles with most of which it is surely impossible not to sympathize. That remark about the lower middle-class writer and his knowing his place is perhaps rather chilling; but for the rest I should find it difficult to dissent from any one of these recommendations. At the same time, I should find it difficult positively to assent to them, with the exception, perhaps, of the injunction as to entering one's notes in a common-place book. They scarcely seem to me to have the quality that Mr. Besant attributes to the rules of the novelist — the "precision and exactness" of "the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion." They are suggestive, they are even inspiring, but they are not exact, though they are doubtless as much so as the case admits of: which is a proof of that liberty of interpretation for which I just contended. For the value of these different injunctions — so beautiful and so vague — is wholly in the meaning one attaches to them. The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most, but the measure of reality is very difficult to fix. The reality of Don Quixote or of Mr. Micawber is a very delicate shade; it is a reality so coloured by the author's vision that, vivid as it may be, one would hesitate to propose it as a model: one would expose one's self to some very embarrassing questions on the part of a pupil. It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being. Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms; the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odour of it, and others have not; as for telling you in advance how your nosegay should be composed, that is another affair. It is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience; to our supposititious aspirant such a declaration might savour of mockery. What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle

in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative — much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius — it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. Greater miracles have been seen than that, imagination assisting, she should speak the truth about some of these gentlemen. I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. These opportunities consisted in her having once, in Paris, as she ascended a staircase, passed an open door where, in the household of a *pasteur*, some of the young Protestants were seated at table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience. She had got her direct personal impression, and she turned out her type. She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French, so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality. Above all, however, she was blessed with the faculty which when you give it an inch takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the social scale. The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it — this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, "Write from experience and experience only," I should feel that this was rather a tantalizing monition if I were not careful immediately to add, "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!"

I am far from intending by this to minimize the importance of exactness — of truth of detail. One can speak best from one's

own taste, and I may therefore venture to say that the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel — the merit on which all its other merits (including that conscious moral purpose of which Mr. Besant speaks) helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist. They are his inspiration, his despair, his reward, his torment, his delight. It is here in very truth that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle. It is in regard to this that Mr. Besant is well inspired when he bids him take notes. He cannot possibly take too many, he cannot possibly take enough. All life solicits him, and to "render" the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business. His case would be easier, and the rule would be more exact, if Mr. Besant had been able to tell him what notes to take. But this, I fear, he can never learn in any manual; it is the business of his life. He has to take a great many in order to select a few, he has to work them up as he can, and even the guides and philosophers who might have most to say to him must leave him alone when it comes to the application of precepts, as we leave the painter in communion with his palette. That his characters "must be clear in outline," as Mr. Besant says — he feels that down to his boots; but how he shall make them so is a secret between his good angel and himself. It would be absurdly simple if he could be taught that a great deal of "description" would make them so, or that on the contrary the absence of description and the cultivation of dialogue, or the absence of dialogue and the multiplication of "incident," would rescue him from his difficulties. Nothing, for instance, is more possible than that he be of a turn of mind for which this odd, literal opposition of description and dialogue, incident and description, has little meaning and light. People often talk of these things as if they had a kind of internecine distinctness, instead of melting into each other at every breath, and being intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression. I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel

worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident, or an incident that derives its interest from any other source than the general and only source of the success of a work of art — that of being illustrative. A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. The critic who over the close texture of a finished work shall pretend to trace a geography of items will mark some frontiers as artificial, I fear, as any that have been known to history. There is an old-fashioned distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident which must have cost many a smile to the intending fabulist who was keen about his work. It appears to me as little to the point as the equally celebrated distinction between the novel and the romance — to answer as little to any reality. There are bad novels and good novels, as there are bad pictures and good pictures; but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning, and I can as little imagine speaking of a novel of character as I can imagine speaking of a picture of character. When one says picture one says of character, when one says novel one says of incident, and the terms may be transposed at will. What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is *not* of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it? It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way; or if it be not an incident I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is an expression of character. If you say you don't see it (character in *that — allons donc!*), this is exactly what the artist who has reasons of his own for thinking he *does* see it undertakes to show you. When a young man makes up his mind that he has not faith enough after all to enter the church as he intended, that is an incident, though you may not hurry to the end of the chapter to see whether perhaps he doesn't change once more. I do not say that these are extraordinary or startling incidents. I do not pretend to estimate the degree of interest proceeding from them, for this will depend upon the skill of the painter. It sounds almost puerile to say that some incidents are intrinsically much more important than others, and I need not take this precaution after having professed

my sympathy for the major ones in remarking that the only classification of the novel that I can understand is into that which has life and that which has it not.

The novel and the romance, the novel of incident and that of character — these clumsy separations appear to me to have been made by critics and readers for their own convenience, and to help them out of some of their occasional queer predicaments, but to have little reality or interest for the producer, from whose point of view it is of course that we are attempting to consider the art of fiction. The case is the same with another shadowy category which Mr. Besant apparently is disposed to set up — that of the "modern English novel"; unless indeed it be that in this matter he has fallen into an accidental confusion of standpoints. It is not quite clear whether he intends the remarks in which he alludes to it to be didactic or historical. It is as difficult to suppose a person intending to write a modern English as to suppose him writing an ancient English novel: that is a label which begs the question. One writes the novel, one paints the picture, of one's language and of one's time, and calling it modern English will not, alas! make the difficult task any easier. No more, unfortunately, will calling this or that work of one's fellow-artist a romance — unless it be, of course, simply for the pleasantness of the thing, as for instance when Hawthorne gave this heading to his story of *Blithedale.* The French, who have brought the theory of fiction to remarkable completeness, have but one name for the novel, and have not attempted smaller things in it, that I can see, for that. I can think of no obligation to which the "romancer" would not be held equally with the novelist; the standard of execution is equally high for each. Of course it is of execution that we are talking — that being the only point of a novel that is open to contention. This is perhaps too often lost sight of, only to produce interminable confusions and cross-purposes. We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donnée:* our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it. Naturally I do not mean that we are bound to like it or find it interesting: in case we do not, our course is perfectly simple — to let it alone. We may believe that of a certain idea even the most sincere novelist can make nothing at all, and the event may perfectly justify our belief; but the failure will have been a failure to execute, and it is in the execution that the fatal weakness is recorded. If we pretend to respect the artist at all, we must allow him his freedom of choice, in the face, in particular

cases, of innumerable presumptions that the choice will not fructify. Art derives a considerable part of its beneficial exercise from flying in the face of presumptions, and some of the most interesting experiments of which it is capable are hidden in the bosom of common things. Gustave Flaubert has written a story about the devotion of a servant-girl to a parrot, and the production, highly finished as it is, cannot on the whole be called a success. We are perfectly free to find it flat, but I think it might have been interesting; and I, for my part, am extremely glad he should have written it; it is a contribution to our knowledge of what can be done — or what cannot. Ivan Turgénieff has written a tale about a deaf and dumb serf and a lap-dog, and the thing is touching, loving, a little masterpiece. He struck the note of life where Gustave Flaubert missed it — he flew in the face of a presumption and achieved a victory.

Nothing, of course, will ever take the place of the good old fashion of "liking" a work of art or not liking it: the most improved criticism will not abolish that primitive, that ultimate test. I mention this to guard myself from the accusation of intimating that the idea, the subject, of a novel or a picture, does not matter. It matters, to my sense, in the highest degree, and if I might put up a prayer it would be that artists should select none but the richest. Some, as I have already hastened to admit, are much more remunerative than others, and it would be a world happily arranged in which persons intending to treat them should be exempt from confusions and mistakes. This fortunate condition will arrive only, I fear, on the same day that critics become purged from error. Meanwhile, I repeat, we do not judge the artist with fairness unless we say to him, "Oh, I grant you your starting-point, because if I did not I should seem to prescribe to you, and heaven forbid I should take that responsibility. If I pretend to tell you what you must not take, you will call upon me to tell you then what you must take; in which case I shall be prettily caught. Moreover, it isn't till I have accepted your data that I can begin to measure you. I have the standard, the pitch; I have no right to tamper with your flute and then criticise your music. Of course I may not care for your idea at all; I may think it silly, or stale, or unclean; in which case I wash my hands of you altogether. I may content myself with believing that you will not have succeeded in being interesting, but I shall, of course, not attempt to demonstrate it, and you will be as indifferent to me as I am to you. I needn't remind you that there

are all sorts of tastes: who can know it better? Some people, for excellent reasons, don't like to read about carpenters; others, for reasons even better, don't like to read about courtesans. Many object to Americans. Others (I believe they are mainly editors and publishers) won't look at Italians. Some readers don't like quiet subjects; others don't like bustling ones. Some enjoy a complete illusion, others the consciousness of large concessions. They choose their novels accordingly, and if they don't care about your idea they won't, *a fortiori*, care about your treatment."

So that it comes back very quickly, as I have said, to the liking: in spite of M. Zola, who reasons less powerfully than he represents, and who will not reconcile himself to this absoluteness of taste, thinking that there are certain things that people ought to like, and that they can be made to like. I am quite at a loss to imagine anything (at any rate in this matter of fiction) that people *ought* to like or to dislike. Selection will be sure to take care of itself, for it has a constant motive behind it. That motive is simply experience. As people feel life, so they will feel the art that is most closely related to it. This closeness of relation is what we should never forget in talking of the effort of the novel. Many people speak of it as a factitious, artificial form, a product of ingenuity, the business of which is to alter and arrange the things that surround us, to translate them into conventional, traditional moulds. This, however, is a view of the matter which carries us but a very short way, condemns the art to an eternal repetition of a few familiar *clichés*,[1] cuts short its development, and leads us straight up to a dead wall. Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet. In proportion as in what she offers us we see life *without* rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it *with* rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention. It is not uncommon to hear an extraordinary assurance of remark in regard to this matter of rearranging, which is often spoken of as if it were the last word of art. Mr. Besant seems to me in danger of falling into the great error with his rather unguarded talk about "selection." Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive. For many people art means rose-coloured window-panes, and selection means picking a bouquet for Mrs. Grundy. They will tell

[1] [Stereotype plates; negatives.]

you glibly that artistic considerations have nothing to do with the disagreeable, with the ugly; they will rattle off shallow commonplaces about the province of art and the limits of art till you are moved to some wonder in return as to the province and the limits of ignorance. It appears to me that no one can ever have made a seriously artistic attempt without becoming conscious of an immense increase — a kind of revelation — of freedom. One perceives in that case — by the light of a heavenly ray — that the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision. As Mr. Besant so justly intimates, it is all experience. That is a sufficient answer to those who maintain that it must not touch the sad things of life, who stick into its divine unconscious bosom little prohibitory inscriptions on the end of sticks, such as we see in public gardens — "It is forbidden to walk on the grass; it is forbidden to touch the flowers; it is not allowed to introduce dogs or to remain after dark; it is requested to keep to the right." The young aspirant in the line of fiction whom we continue to imagine will do nothing without taste, for in that case his freedom would be of little use to him; but the first advantage of his taste will be to reveal to him the absurdity of the little sticks and tickets. If he have taste, I must add, of course he will have ingenuity, and my disrespectful reference to that quality just now was not meant to imply that it is useless in fiction. But it is only a secondary aid; the first is a capacity for receiving straight impressions.

Mr. Besant has some remarks on the question of "the story" which I shall not attempt to criticise, though they seem to me to contain a singular ambiguity, because I do not think I understand them. I cannot see what is meant by talking as if there were a part of a novel which is the story and part of it which for mystical reasons is not — unless indeed the distinction be made in a sense in which it is difficult to suppose that any one should attempt to convey anything. "The story," if it represents anything, represents the subject, the idea, the *donnée* of the novel; and there is surely no "school" — Mr. Besant speaks of a school — which urges that a novel should be all treatment and no subject. There must assuredly be something to treat; every school is intimately conscious of that. This sense of the story being the idea, the starting-point, of the novel, is the only one that I see in which it can be spoken of as something different from its organic whole; and since in proportion as the work is successful the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every

punctuation-point contribute directly to the expression, in that proportion do we lose our sense of the story being a blade which may be drawn more or less out of its sheath. The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and thread, and I never heard of a guild of tailors who recommended the use of the thread without the needle, or the needle without the thread. Mr. Besant is not the only critic who may be observed to have spoken as if there were certain things in life which constitute stories, and certain others which do not. I find the same odd implication in an entertaining article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, devoted, as it happens, to Mr. Besant's lecture. "The story is the thing!" says this graceful writer, as if with a tone of opposition to some other idea. I should think it was, as every painter who, as the time for "sending in" his picture looms in the distance, finds himself still in quest of a subject — as every belated artist not fixed about his theme will heartily agree. There are some subjects which speak to us and others which do not, but he would be a clever man who should undertake to give a rule — an index expurgatorius — by which the story and the no-story should be known apart. It is impossible (to me at least) to imagine any such rule which shall not be altogether arbitrary. The writer in the *Pall Mall* opposes the delightful (as I suppose) novel of *Margot la Balafrée* to certain tales in which "Bostonian nymphs" appear to have "rejected English dukes for psychological reasons." I am not acquainted with the romance just designated, and can scarcely forgive the *Pall Mall* critic for not mentioning the name of the author, but the title appears to refer to a lady who may have received a scar in some heroic adventure. I am inconsolable at not being acquainted with this episode, but am utterly at a loss to see why it is a story when the rejection (or acceptance) of a duke is not, and why a reason, psychological or other, is not a subject when a cicatrix is. They are all particles of the multitudinous life with which the novel deals, and surely no dogma which pretends to make it lawful to touch the one and unlawful to touch the other will stand for a moment on its feet. It is the special picture that must stand or fall, according as it seem to possess truth or to lack it. Mr. Besant does not, to my sense, light up the subject by intimating that a story must, under penalty of not being a story, consist of "adventures." Why of adventures more than of green spectacles? He mentions a category of impossible things, and among them he places "fiction without adventure." Why without adventure, more than without

matrimony, or celibacy, or parturition, or cholera, or hydropathy, or Jansenism? This seems to me to bring the novel back to the hapless little *rôle* of being an artificial, ingenious thing — bring it down from its large, free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life. And what *is* adventure, when it comes to that, and by what sign is the listening pupil to recognize it? It is an adventure — an immense one — for me to write this little article; and for a Bostonian nymph to reject an English duke is an adventure only less stirring, I should say, than for an English duke to be rejected by a Bostonian nymph. I see dramas within dramas in that, and innumerable points of view. A psychological reason is, to my imagination, an object adorably pictorial; to catch the tint of its complexion — I feel as if that idea might inspire one to Titianesque efforts. There are few things more exciting to me, in short, than a psychological reason, and yet, I protest, the novel seems to me the most magnificent form of art. I have just been reading, at the same time, the delightful story of *Treasure Island*, by Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson and, in a manner less consecutive, the last tale from M. Edmond de Goncourt, which is entitled *Chérie*. One of these works treats of murders, mysteries, islands of dreadful renown, hairbreadth escapes, miraculous coincidences and buried doubloons. The other treats of a little French girl who lived in a fine house in Paris, and died of wounded sensibility because no one would marry her. I call *Treasure Island* delightful, because it appears to me to have succeeded wonderfully in what it attempts; and I venture to bestow no epithet upon *Chérie*, which strikes me as having failed deplorably in what it attempts — that is in tracing the development of the moral consciousness of a child. But one of these productions strikes me as exactly as much of a novel as the other, and as having a "story" quite as much. The moral consciousness of a child is as much a part of life as the islands of the Spanish Main, and the one sort of geography seems to me to have those "surprises" of which Mr. Besant speaks quite as much as the other. For myself (since it comes back in the last resort, as I say, to the preference of the individual), the picture of the child's experience has the advantage that I can at successive steps (an immense luxury, near to the "sensual pleasure" of which Mr. Besant's critic in the *Pall Mall* speaks) say Yes or No, as it may be, to what the artist puts before me. I have been a child in fact, but I have been on a quest for a buried treasure only in supposition, and it is a simple accident that with M. de Goncourt I should have for

the most part to say No. With George Eliot, when she painted that country with a far other intelligence, I always said Yes.

The most interesting part of Mr. Besant's lecture is unfortunately the briefest passage — his very cursory allusion to the "conscious moral purpose" of the novel. Here again it is not very clear whether he be recording a fact or laying down a principle; it is a great pity that in the latter case he should not have developed his idea. This branch of the subject is of immense importance, and Mr. Besant's few words point to considerations of the widest reach, not to be lightly disposed of. He will have treated the art of fiction but superficially who is not prepared to go every inch of the way that these considerations will carry him. It is for this reason that at the beginning of these remarks I was careful to notify the reader that my reflections on so large a theme have no pretension to be exhaustive. Like Mr. Besant, I have left the question of the morality of the novel till the last, and at the last I find I have used up my space. It is a question surrounded with difficulties, as witness the very first that meets us, in the form of a definite question, on the threshold. Vagueness, in such a discussion, is fatal, and what is the meaning of your morality and your conscious moral purpose? Will you not define your terms and explain how (a novel being a picture) a picture can be either moral or immoral? You wish to paint a moral picture or carve a moral statue: will you not tell us how you would set about it? We are discussing the Art of Fiction; questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair, and will you not let us see how it is that you find it so easy to mix them up? These things are so clear to Mr. Besant that he has deduced from them a law which he sees embodied in English Fiction, and which is "a truly admirable thing and a great cause for congratulation." It is a great cause for congratulation indeed when such thorny problems become as smooth as silk. I may add that in so far as Mr. Besant perceives that in point of fact English Fiction has addressed itself preponderantly to these delicate questions he will appear to many people to have made a vain discovery. They will have been positively struck, on the contrary, with the moral timidity of the usual English novelist; with his (or with her) aversion to face the difficulties with which on every side the treatment of reality bristles. He is apt to be extremely shy (whereas the picture that Mr. Besant draws is a picture of boldness), and the sign of his work, for the most part, is a cautious silence on certain subjects.

In the English novel (by which of course I mean the American as well), more than in any other, there is a traditional difference between that which people know and that which they agree to admit that they know, that which they see and that which they speak of, that which they feel to be a part of life and that which they allow to enter into literature. There is the great difference, in short, between what they talk of in conversation and what they talk of in print. The essence of moral energy is to survey the whole field, and I should directly reverse Mr. Besant's remark and say not that the English novel has a purpose, but that it has a diffidence. To what degree a purpose in a work of art is a source of corruption I shall not attempt to inquire; the one that seems to me least dangerous is the purpose of making a perfect work. As for our novel, I may say lastly on this score that as we find it in England to-day it strikes me as addressed in a large degree to "young people," and that this in itself constitutes a presumption that it will be rather shy. There are certain things which it is generally agreed not to discuss, not even to mention, before young people. That is very well, but the absence of discussion is not a symptom of the moral passion. The purpose of the English novel — "a truly admirable thing, and a great cause for congratulation" — strikes me therefore as rather negative.

There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground: if the youthful aspirant take it to heart it will illuminate for him many of the mysteries of "purpose." There are many other useful things that might be said to him, but I have come to the end of my article, and can only touch them as I pass. The critic in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, whom I have already quoted, draws attention to the danger, in speaking of the art of fiction, of generalizing. The danger that he has in mind is rather, I imagine, that of particularizing, for there are some comprehensive remarks which, in addition to those embodied in Mr. Besant's suggestive lecture, might without fear of misleading him be addressed to the ingenuous student. I should

remind him first of the magnificence of the form that is open to him, which offers to sight so few restrictions and such innumerable opportunities. The other arts, in comparison, appear confined and hampered; the various conditions under which they are exercised are so rigid and definite. But the only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of the novel is, as I have already said, that it be sincere. This freedom is a splendid privilege, and the first lesson of the young novelist is to learn to be worthy of it. "Enjoy it as it deserves," I should say to him; "take possession of it, explore it to its utmost extent, publish it, rejoice in it. All life belongs to you, and do not listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits, or to those who would persuade you that this heavenly messenger wings her way outside of life altogether, breathing a superfine air, and turning away her head from the truth of things. There is no impression of life, no manner of seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of the novelist may not offer a place; you have only to remember that talents so dissimilar as those of Alexandre Dumas and Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Gustave Flaubert have worked in this field with equal glory. Do not think too much about optimism and pessimism; try and catch the colour of life itself. In France to-day we see a prodigious effort (that of Emile Zola, to whose solid and serious work no explorer of the capacity of the novel can allude without respect), we see an extraordinary effort vitiated by a spirit of pessimism on a narrow basis. M. Zola is magnificent, but he strikes an English reader as ignorant; he has an air of working in the dark; if he had as much light as energy, his results would be of the highest value. As for the aberrations of a shallow optimism, the ground (of English fiction especially) is strewn with their brittle particles as with broken glass. If you must indulge in conclusions, let them have the taste of a wide knowledge. Remember that your first duty is to be as complete as possible — to make as perfect a work. Be generous and delicate and pursue the prize."

XII

EDGAR ALLAN POE

(1809–1849)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION

(1846)

CHARLES DICKENS, in a note now lying before me, alluding to an examination I once made of the mechanism of *Barnaby Rudge*, says — "By the way, are you aware that Godwin wrote his *Caleb Williams* backwards? He first involved his hero in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about him for some mode of accounting for what had been done."

I cannot think this the *precise* mode of procedure on the part of Godwin — and indeed what he himself acknowledges is not altogether in accordance with Mr. Dickens's idea — but the author of *Caleb Williams* was too good an artist not to perceive the advantage derivable from at least a somewhat similar process. Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.

There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story. Either history affords a thesis — or one is suggested by an incident of the day — or, at best, the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to form merely the basis of his narrative — designing, generally, to fill in with description, dialogue, or authorial comment, whatever

crevices of fact or action may, from page to page, render themselves apparent.

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. Keeping originality *always* in view — for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest — I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects or impressions of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" Having chosen a novel first, and secondly, a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone — whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone — afterwards looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event or tone as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.

I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would — that is to say, who could — detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world I am much at a loss to say — but perhaps the authorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers — poets in especial — prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy — an ecstatic intuition — and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought — at the true purposes seized only at the last moment — at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view — at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable — at the cautious selections and rejections — at the painful erasures and interpolations — in a word, at the wheels and pinions — the tackle for scene-shifting — the step-ladders and demon-traps — the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrio*.

I am aware, on the other hand, that the case is by no means common in which an author is at all in condition to retrace the steps by which his conclusions have been attained. In general, suggestions, having arisen pell-mell, are pursued and forgotten in a similar manner.

For my own part, I have neither sympathy with the repugnance

alluded to, nor, at any time, the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions; and, since the interest of an analysis, or reconstruction, such as I have considered a *desideratum*, is quite independent of any real or fancied interest in the thing analyzed, it will not be regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to show the *modus operandi* by which some one of my own works was put together. I select *The Raven* as most generally known. It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition — that the work proceeded step by step to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.

Let us dismiss, as irrelevant to the poem, *per se*, the circumstance — or say the necessity — which, in the first place, gave rise to the intention of composing *a* poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste.

We commence, then, with this intention.

The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression — for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. But since, *ceteris paribus*,[1] no poet can afford to dispense with *anything* that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no at once. What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones — that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating the soul; and all intense excitements are, through a psychal necessity, brief. For this reason at least one-half of the *Paradise Lost* is essentially prose — a succession of poetical excitements interspersed, *inevitably*, with corresponding depressions — the whole being deprived, through the extremeness of its length, of the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity of effect.

It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art — the limit of a single sitting — and that, although in certain classes of pure composition, such as *Robinson Crusoe* (demanding no unity), this limit may be advan-

[1] [Other things being equal.]

tageously overpassed, it can never properly be overpassed in a poem. Within this limit the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit — in other words, to the excitement or elevation — again, in other words, to the degree of the true poetical effect which it is capable of inducing; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect — this, with one proviso — that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all.

Holding in view these considerations, as well as that degree of excitement which I deemed not above the popular, while not below the critical taste, I reached at once what I conceived the proper *length* for my intended poem — a length of about one hundred lines. It is, in fact, a hundred and eight.

My next thought concerned the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that, throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work *universally* appreciable. I should be carried too far out of my immediate topic were I to demonstrate a point upon which I have repeatedly insisted, and which, with the poetical, stands not in the slightest need of demonstration — the point, I mean, that Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. A few words, however, in elucidation of my real meaning, which some of my friends have evinced a disposition to misrepresent. That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect — they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of *soul* — *not* of intellect, or of heart — upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating "the beautiful." Now I designate Beauty as the province of the poem, merely because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes — that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their attainment — no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation alluded to, is *most readily* attained in the poem. Now, the object Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable to a certain extent in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose. Truth, in fact, demands a precision, and Passion a *homeliness* (the truly

passionate will comprehend me) which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul. It by no means follows from anything here said that passion, or even truth, may not be introduced, and even profitably introduced, into a poem — for they may serve in elucidation, or aid the general effect, as do discords in music, by contrast — but the true artist will always contrive, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominant aim, and, secondly, to enveil them, as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem.

Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the *tone* of its highest manifestation — and all experience has shown that this tone is one of *sadness*. Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.

The length, the province, and the tone, being thus determined, I betook myself to ordinary induction, with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem — some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects — or more properly *points*, in the theatrical sense — I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the *refrain*. The universality of its employment sufficed to assure me of its intrinsic value, and spared me the necessity of submitting it to analysis. I considered it, however, with regard to its susceptibility of improvement, and soon saw it to be in a primitive condition. As commonly used, the *refrain*, or burden, not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone — both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity — of repetition. I resolved to diversify, and so heighten the effect, by adhering in general to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation *of the application* — of the *refrain* — the *refrain* itself remaining, for the most part, unvaried.

These points being settled, I next bethought me of the *nature* of my *refrain*. Since its application was to be repeatedly varied, it was clear that the *refrain* itself must be brief, for there would have been an insurmountable difficulty in frequent variations

of application in any sentence of length. In proportion to the brevity of the sentence would, of course, be the facility of the variation. This led me at once to a single word as the best *refrain.*

The question now arose as to the *character* of the word. Having made up my mind to a *refrain*, the division of the poem into stanzas was, of course, a corollary, the *refrain* forming the close of each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt, and these considerations inevitably led me to the long *o* as the most sonorous vowel in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant.

The sound of the *refrain* being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself.

The next *desideratum* was a pretext for the continuous use of the one word "nevermore." In observing the difficulty which I at once found in inventing a sufficiently plausible reason for its continuous repetition, I did not fail to perceive that this difficulty arose solely from the preassumption that the word was to be so continuously or monotonously spoken by a *human* being — I did not fail to perceive, in short, that the difficulty lay in the reconciliation of this monotony with the exercise of reason on the part of the creature repeating the word. Here, then, immediately arose the idea of a *non*-reasoning creature capable of speech, and very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superseded forthwith by a Raven as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended *tone.*

I had now gone so far as the conception of a Raven, the bird of ill-omen, monotonously repeating the one word "Nevermore" at the conclusion of each stanza in the poem of melancholy tone, and in length about one hundred lines. Now, never losing sight of the object — *supremeness* or perfection at all points, I asked myself — "Of all melancholy topics what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?" Death, was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length the answer here also is obvious

— "When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty:* the death, then, of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."

I had now to combine the two ideas of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven continuously repeating the word "Nevermore." I had to combine these, bearing in mind my design of varying at every turn the *application* of the word repeated, but the only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded for the effect on which I had been depending, that is to say, the effect of the *variation of application.* I saw that I could make the first query propounded by the lover — the first query to which the Raven should reply "Nevermore" — that I could make this first query a commonplace one, the second less so, the third still less, and so on, until at length the lover, startled from his original *nonchalance* by the melancholy character of the word itself, by its frequent repetition, and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it, is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character — queries whose solution he has passionately at heart — propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture — propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which reason assures him is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote), but because he experiences a frenzied pleasure in so modelling his questions as to receive from the *expected* "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrows. Perceiving the opportunity thus afforded me, or, more strictly, thus forced upon me in the progress of construction, I first established in my mind the climax or concluding query — that query to which "Nevermore" should be in the last place an answer — that query in reply to which this word "Nevermore" should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.

Here, then, the poem may be said to have had its beginning, at the end where all works of art should begin, for it was here at this point of my preconsiderations that I first put pen to paper in the composition of the stanza: —

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! prophet still if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us — by that God we both adore,
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore —
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven — "Nevermore."

I composed this stanza, at this point, first, that, by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover, and secondly, that I might definitely settle the rhythm, the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza, as well as graduate the stanzas which were to precede, so that none of them might surpass this in rhythmical effect. Had I been able in the subsequent composition to construct more vigorous stanzas I should without scruple have purposely enfeebled them so as not to interfere with the climacteric effect.

And here I may as well say a few words of the versification. My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected in versification is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in mere *rhythm*, it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite, and yet, *for centuries, no man, in verse, has ever done, or ever seemed to think of doing, an original thing.* The fact is that originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation.

Of course, I pretend to no originality in either the rhythm or metre of the *Raven*. The former is trochaic — the latter is octametre acatalectic, alternating with heptametre catalectic repeated in the *refrain* of the fifth verse, and terminating with tetrametre catalectic. Less pedantically — the feet employed throughout (trochees) consist of a long syllable followed by a short; the first line of the stanza consists of eight of these feet, the second of seven and a half (in effect two-thirds), the third of eight, the fourth of seven and a half, the fifth the same, the sixth three and a half. Now, each of these lines taken individually has been employed before, and what originality the *Raven* has, is in their *combination into stanza*, nothing even remotely approaching

this combination has ever been attempted. The effect of this originality of combination is aided by other unusual and some altogether novel effects, arising from an extension of the application of the principles of rhyme and alliteration.

The next point to be considered was the mode of bringing together the lover and the Raven — and the first branch of this consideration was the *locale*. For this the most natural suggestion might seem to be a forest, or the fields — but it has always appeared to me that a close *circumscription of space* is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident — it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place.

I determined, then, to place the lover in his chamber — in a chamber rendered sacred to him by memories of her who had frequented it. The room is represented as richly furnished — this in mere pursuance of the ideas I have already explained on the subject of Beauty, as the sole true poetical thesis.

The *locale* being thus determined, I had now to introduce the bird — and the thought of introducing him through the window was inevitable. The idea of making the lover suppose, in the first instance, that the flapping of the wings of the bird against the shutter is a "tapping" at the door, originated in a wish to increase, by prolonging the reader's curiosity, and in a desire to admit the incidental effect arising from the lover's throwing open the door, finding all dark, and thence adopting the half-fancy that it was the spirit of his mistress that knocked.

I made the night tempestuous, first to account for the Raven's seeking admission, and secondly, for the effect of contrast with the (physical) serenity within the chamber.

I made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage — it being understood that the bust was absolutely *suggested* by the bird — the bust of *Pallas* being chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover, and, secondly, for the sonorousness of the word, Pallas, itself.

About the middle of the poem, also, I have availed myself of the force of contrast, with a view of deepening the ultimate impression. For example, an air of the fantastic — approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as was admissible — is given to the Raven's entrance. He comes in "with many a flirt and flutter."

Not the *least obeisance made he* — not a moment stopped or stayed he,
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door.

In the two stanzas which follow, the design is more obviously carried out: —

Then this ebony bird, beguiling my sad fancy into smiling
By the *grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,*
"Though thy *crest be shorn and shaven,* thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore —
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore?"
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled *this ungainly fowl* to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning — little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door —
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

The effect of the *dénouement* being thus provided for, I immediately drop the fantastic for a tone of the most profound seriousness — this tone commencing in the stanza directly following the one last quoted, with the line —

But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust, spoke only, etc.

From this epoch the lover no longer jests — no longer sees anything even of the fantastic in the Raven's demeanour. He speaks of him as a "grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore," and feels the "fiery eyes" burning into his "bosom's core." This revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader — to bring the mind into a proper frame for their *dénouement* — which is now brought about as rapidly and as *directly* as possible.

With the *dénouement* proper — with the Raven's reply, "Nevermore," to the lover's final demand if he shall meet his mistress in another world — the poem, in its obvious phase, that of a simple narrative, may be said to have its completion. So far, everything is within the limits of the accountable — of the real. A raven, having learned by rote the single word "Nevermore," and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still gleams — the chamber-window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mis-

tress deceased. The casement being thrown open at the fluttering of the bird's wings, the bird itself perches on the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of the student, who, amused by the incident and the oddity of the visitor's demeanour, demands of it, in jest and without looking for a reply, its name. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word, "Nevermore" — a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again startled by the fowl's repetition of "Nevermore." The student now guesses the state of the case, but is impelled, as I have before explained, by the human thirst for self-torture, and in part by superstition, to propound such queries to the bird as will bring him, the lover, the most of the luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer "Nevermore." With the indulgence, to the extreme, of this self-torture, the narration, in what I have termed its first or obvious phase, has a natural termination, and so far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real.

But in subjects so handled, however skilfully, or with however vivid an array of incident, there is always a certain hardness or nakedness which repels the artistical eye. Two things are invariably required — first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness — some undercurrent, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that *richness* (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with *the ideal*. It is the *excess* of the suggested meaning — it is the rendering this the upper instead of the undercurrent of the theme — which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind) the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists.

Holding these opinions, I added the two concluding stanzas of the poem — their suggestiveness being thus made to pervade all the narrative which has preceded them. The undercurrent of meaning is rendered first apparent in the lines: —

> "Take thy beak from out *my heart*, and take thy form from off my door!"
> Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore!"

It will be observed that the words, "from out my heart," involve the first metaphorical expression in the poem. They, with the answer, "Nevermore," dispose the mind to seek a moral in all

that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical — but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza that the intention of making him emblematical of *Mournful and never-ending Remembrance* is permitted distinctly to be seen: —

> And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,
> On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
> And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
> And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
> And my soul *from out that shadow* that lies floating on the floor
> Shall be lifted — nevermore.

XIII

MATTHEW ARNOLD

(1822–1888)

THE STUDY OF POETRY

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"THE future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea *is* the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry."

Let me be permitted to quote these words of my own, as uttering the thought which should, in my opinion, go with us and govern us in all our study of poetry. In the present work it is the course of one great contributory stream to the world-river of poetry that we are invited to follow. We are here invited to trace the stream of English poetry. But whether we set ourselves, as here, to follow only one of the several streams that make the mighty river of poetry, or whether we seek to know them all, our governing thought should be the same. We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to

turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it. For finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science"; and what is a countenance without its expression? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge": our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being; what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize "the breath and finer spirit of knowledge" offered to us by poetry.

But if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment. Sainte-Beuve relates that Napoleon one day said, when somebody was spoken of in his presence as a charlatan: "Charlatan as much as you please; but where is there *not* charlatanism?" — "Yes," answers Sainte-Beuve, "in politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of man's being." It is admirably said, and let us hold fast to it. In poetry, which is thought and art in one, it is the glory, the eternal honour, that charlatanism shall find no entrance; that this noble sphere be kept inviolate and inviolable. Charlatanism is for confusing or obliterating the distinctions between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true. It is charlatanism, conscious or unconscious, whenever we confuse or obliterate these. And in poetry, more than anywhere else, it is unpermissible to confuse or obliterate them. For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because of the high destinies of poetry. In poetry, as a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of

poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. A clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, is the most precious benefit which we can gather from a poetical collection such as the present. And yet in the very nature and conduct of such a collection there is inevitably something which tends to obscure in us the consciousness of what our benefit should be, and to distract us from the pursuit of it. We should therefore steadily set it before our minds at the outset, and should compel ourselves to revert constantly to the thought of it as we proceed.

Yes; constantly in reading poetry, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read. But this real estimate, the only true one, is liable to be superseded, if we are not watchful, by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious. A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really. They may count to us historically. The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising it; in short, to overrate it. So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic. Then, again, a poet or a poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings, and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And

thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments — the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal.

Both fallacies are natural. It is evident how naturally the study of the history and development of a poetry may incline a man to pause over reputations and works once conspicuous but now obscure, and to quarrel with a careless public for skipping, in obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses, and of the reason for keeping what it keeps, and of the whole process of growth in its poetry. The French have become diligent students of their own early poetry, which they long neglected; the study makes many of them dissatisfied with their so-called classical poetry, the court-tragedy of the seventeenth century, a poetry which Pellisson long ago reproached with its want of the true poetic stamp, with its *politesse stérile et rampante*,[1] but which nevertheless has reigned in France as absolutely as if it had been the perfection of classical poetry indeed. The dissatisfaction is natural; yet a lively and accomplished critic, M. Charles d'Héricault, the editor of Clément Marot, goes too far when he says that "the cloud of glory playing round a classic is a mist as dangerous to the future of a literature as it is intolerable for the purposes of history." "It hinders," he goes on, "it hinders us from seeing more than one single point, the culminating and exceptional point; the summary, fictitious and arbitrary, of a thought and of a work. It substitutes a halo for a physiognomy, it puts a statue where there was once a man, and hiding from us all trace of the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures, it claims not study but veneration; it does not show us how the thing is done, it imposes upon us a model. Above all, for the historian this creation of classic personages is inadmissible; for it withdraws the poet from his time, from his proper life, it breaks historical relationships, it blinds criticism by conventional admiration, and renders the investigation of literary origins unacceptable. It gives us a human personage no longer, but a God seated immovable amidst His perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus; and hardly will it be possible for the young student, to whom such work is exhibited at such a distance from him, to believe that it did not issue ready made from that divine head."

All this is brilliantly and tellingly said, but we must plead for a distinction. Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic

[1] [With its unfertile and obtrusive polish.]

character. If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word *classic*, *classical*), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character. This is what is salutary, this is what is formative; this is the great benefit to be got from the study of poetry. Everything which interferes with it, which hinders it, is injurious. True, we must read our classic with open eyes, and not with eyes blinded with superstition; we must perceive when his work comes short, when it drops out of the class of the very best, and we must rate it, in such cases, at its proper value. But the use of this negative criticism is not in itself, it is entirely in its enabling us to have a clearer sense and a deeper enjoyment of what is truly excellent. To trace the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures of a genuine classic, to acquaint one's self with his time and his life and his historical relationships, is mere literary dilettantism unless it has that clear sense and deeper enjoyment for its end. It may be said that the more we know about a classic the better we shall enjoy him; and, if we lived as long as Methuselah and had all of us heads of perfect clearness and wills of perfect steadfastness, this might be true in fact as it is plausible in theory. But the case here is much the same as the case with the Greek and Latin studies of our schoolboys. The elaborate philological groundwork which we require them to lay is in theory an admirable preparation for appreciating the Greek and Latin authors worthily, The more thoroughly we lay the groundwork, the better we shall be able, it may be said, to enjoy the authors. True, if time were not so short, and schoolboys' wits not so soon tired and their power of attention exhausted; only, as it is, the elaborate philological preparation goes on, but the authors are little known and less enjoyed. So with the investigator of "historic origins" in poetry. He ought to enjoy the true classic all the better for his investigations; he often is distracted from the enjoyment of the best, and with the less good he overbusies himself, and is prone to overrate it in proportion to the trouble which it has cost him.

The idea of tracing historic origins and historical relationships cannot be absent from a compilation like the present. And naturally the poets to be exhibited in it will be assigned to those persons for exhibition who are known to prize them highly, rather than to

those who have no special inclination towards them. Moreover the very occupation with an author, and the business of exhibiting him, disposes us to affirm and amplify his importance. In the present work, therefore, we are sure of frequent temptation to adopt the historic estimate, or the personal estimate, and to forget the real estimate; which latter, nevertheless, we must employ if we are to make poetry yield us its full benefit. So high is that benefit, the benefit of clearly feeling and of deeply enjoying the really excellent, the truly classic in poetry, that we do well, I say, to set it fixedly before our minds as our object in studying poets and poetry, and to make the desire of attaining it the one principle to which, as the *Imitation* says, whatever we may read or come to know, we always return. *Cum multa legeris et cognoveris, ad unum semper oportet redire principium.*

The historic estimate is likely in especial to affect our judgment and our language when we are dealing with ancient poets; the personal estimate when we are dealing with poets our contemporaries, or at any rate modern. The exaggerations due to the historic estimate are not in themselves, perhaps, of very much gravity. Their report hardly enters the general ear; probably they do not always impose even on the literary men who adopt them. But they lead to a dangerous abuse of language. So we hear Cædmon, amongst our own poets, compared to Milton. I have already noticed the enthusiasm of one accomplished French critic for "historic origins." Another eminent French critic, M. Vitet, comments upon that famous document of the early poetry of his nation, the *Chanson de Roland*. It is indeed a most interesting document. The *joculator* or *jongleur* Taillefer, who was with William the Conquerer's army at Hastings, marched before the Norman troops, so said the tradition, singing "of Charlemagne and of Roland and of Oliver, and of the vassals who died at Roncevaux"; and it is suggested that in the *Chanson de Roland* by one Turoldus or Théroulde, a poem preserved in a manuscript of the twelfth century in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, we have certainly the matter, perhaps even some of the words, of the chant which Taillefer sang. The poem has vigour and freshness; it is not without pathos. But M. Vitet is not satisfied with seeing in it a document of some poetic value, and of very high historic and linguistic value; he sees in it a grand and beautiful work, a monument of epic genius. In its general design he finds the grandiose conception, in its details he finds the constant union of simplicity

with greatness, which are the marks, he truly says, of the genuine epic, and distinguish it from the artificial epic of literary ages. One thinks of Homer; this is the sort of praise which is given to Homer, and justly given. Higher praise there cannot well be, and it is the praise due to epic poetry of the highest order only, and to no other. Let us try, then, the *Chanson de Roland*, at its best. Roland, mortally wounded, lays himself down under a pine-tree, with his face turned towards Spain and the enemy —

> "De plusurs choses à remembrer li prist,
> De tantes teres cume libers cunquist,
> De dulce France, des humes de sun lign,
> De Carlemagne sun seignor ki l'nurrit." [1]

That is primitive work, I repeat, with an undeniable poetic quality of its own. It deserves such praise, and such praise is sufficient for it. But now turn to Homer —

> Ὣς φάτο : τοὺς δ' ἤδη κατέχεν φυσίζοος αἶα
> ἐν Δακεδαίμονι αὖθι, φίλῃ ἐν πατρίδι γαίῃ.[2]

We are here in another world, another order of poetry altogether; here is rightly due such supreme praise as that which M. Vitet gives to the *Chanson de Roland*. If our words are to have any meaning, if our judgments are to have any solidity, we must not heap that supreme praise upon poetry of an order immeasurably inferior.

Indeed there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry. Of course we are not to require this other poetry to resemble them; it may be very dissimilar. But if we have any tact we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, an infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently. Take the

[1] "Then began he to call many things to remembrance, — all the lands which his valour conquered, and pleasant France, and the men of his lineage, and Charlemagne his liege lord who nourished him." — *Chanson de Roland*, III. 939–942.

[2] "So said she; they long since in Earth's soft arms were reposing,
There, in their own dear land, their fatherland, Lacedæmon."
Iliad, III. 243, 244 (translated by Dr. Hawtrey).

two lines which I have just quoted from Homer, the poet's comment on Helen's mention of her brothers; — or take his

> Ἆ δειλώ, τί σφῶϊ δόμεν Πηλῆϊ ἄνακτι
> θνητᾷ; ὑμεῖς δ' ἐστὸν ἀγήρω τ' ἀθανάτω τε.
> ἦ ἵνα δυστήνοισι μετ' ἀνδράσιν ἄλγε' ἔχητον; [1]

the address of Zeus to the horses of Peleus; — or take finally his

> Καὶ σέ, γέρον, τὸ πρὶν μὲν ἀκούομεν ὄλβιον εἶναι· [2]

the words of Achilles to Priam, a suppliant before him. Take that incomparable line and a half of Dante, Ugolino's tremendous words —

> "Io no piangeva; sì dentro impietrai.
> Piangevan elli . . ." [3]

Take the lovely words of Beatrice to Virgil —

> "Io son fatta da Dio, sua mercè, tale,
> Che la vostra miseria non mi tange,
> Nè fiamma d'esto incendio non m'assale . . ." [4]

Take the simple, but perfect, single line —

> "In la sua volontade è nostra pace." [5]

Take of Shakespeare a line or two of Henry the Fourth's expostulation with sleep —

> "Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast
> Seal up the ship-boy's eyes, and rock his brains
> In cradle of the rude imperious surge . . ."

and take, as well, Hamlet's dying request to Horatio —

> "If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story . . ."

[1] "Ah, unhappy pair, why gave we you to King Peleus, to a mortal? but ye are without old age, and immortal. Was it that with men born to misery ye might have sorrow?" — *Iliad*, XVI. 443–445.

[2] "Nay, and thou too, old man, in former days wast, as we hear, happy." — *Iliad*, XXIV. 543.

[3] "I wailed not, so of stone grew I within; — *they* wailed." — *Inferno*, XXXIII. 39, 40.

[4] "Of such sort hath God, thanked be His mercy, made me, that your misery toucheth me not, neither doth the flame of this fire strike me." — *Inferno*, II. 91–93.

[5] "In His will is our peace." — *Paradiso*, III. 85.

Take of Milton that Miltonic passage —

> "Darken'd so, yet shone
> Above them all the archangel; but his face
> Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd, and care
> Sat on his faded cheek . . ."

add two such lines as —

> "And courage never to submit or yield
> And what is else not to be overcome . . ."

and finish with the exquisite close to the loss of Proserpine, the loss

> ". . . which cost Ceres all that pain
> To seek her through the world."

These few lines, if we have tact and can use them, are enough even of themselves to keep clear and sound our judgments about poetry, to save us from fallacious estimates of it, to conduct us to a real estimate.

The specimens I have quoted differ widely from one another, but they have in common this: the possession of the very highest poetical quality. If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there. Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in the abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples; — to take specimens of poetry of the high, the very highest quality, and to say: The characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed *there*. They are far better recognized by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic. Nevertheless if we are urgently pressed to give some critical account of them, we may safely, perhaps, venture on laying down, not indeed how and why the characters arise, but where and in what they arise. They are in the matter and substance of the poetry, and they are in its manner and style. Both of these, the substance and matter on the one hand, the style and manner on the other, have a mark, an accent, of high beauty, worth, and power. But if we are asked to define this mark and accent in the abstract, our answer must be: No, for we should thereby be darkening the question, not clearing

it. The mark and accent are as given by the substance and matter of that poetry, by the style and manner of that poetry, and of all other poetry which is akin to it in quality.

Only one thing we may add as to the substance and matter of poetry, guiding ourselves by Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness (*φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον*). Let us add, therefore, to what we have said, this: that the substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness. We may add yet further, what is in itself evident, that to the style and manner of the best poetry their special character, their accent, is given by their diction, and, even yet more, by their movement. And though we distinguish between the two characters, the two accents, of superiority, yet they are nevertheless vitally connected one with the other. The superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner. The two superiorities are closely related, and are in steadfast proportion one to the other. So far as high poetic truth and seriousness are wanting to a poet's matter and substance, so far also, we may be sure, will a high poetic stamp of diction and movement be wanting to his style and manner. In proportion as this high stamp of diction and movement, again, is absent from a poet's style and manner, we shall find, also, that high poetic truth and seriousness are absent from his substance and matter.

So stated, these are but dry general ties; their whole force lies in their application. And I could wish every student of poetry to make the application of them for himself. Made by himself, the application would impress itself upon his mind far more deeply than made by me. Neither will my limits allow me to make any full application of the generalities above propounded; but in the hope of bringing out, at any rate, some significance in them, and of establishing an important principle more firmly by their means, I will, in the space which remains to me, follow rapidly from the commencement the course of our English poetry with them in my view.

Once more I return to the early poetry of France, with which our own poetry, in its origins, is indissolubly connected. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that seed-time of all modern language and literature, the poetry of France had a clear predominance

in Europe. Of the two divisions of that poetry, its productions in the *langue d'oil* and its productions in the *langue d'oc*, the poetry of the *langue d'oc*, of southern France, or the troubadours, is of importance because of its effect on Italian literature; — the first literature of modern Europe to strike the true and grand note, and to bring forth, as in Dante and Petrarch it brought forth, classics. But the predominance of French poetry in Europe, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is due to its poetry of the *langue d'oil*, the poetry of northern France and of the tongue which is now the French language. In the twelfth century the bloom of this romance-poetry was earlier and stronger in England, at the court of our Anglo-Norman kings, than in France itself. But it was a bloom of French poetry; and as our native poetry formed itself, it formed itself out of this. The romance-poems which took possession of the heart and imagination of Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are French; "they are," as Southey justly says, "the pride of French literature, nor have we anything which can be placed in competition with them." Themes were supplied from all quarters; but the romance-setting which was common to them all, and which gained the ear of Europe, was French. This constituted for the French poetry, literature, and language, at the height of the Middle Age, an unchallenged predominance. The Italian Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, wrote his *Treasure* in French because, he says, "la parleure en est plus délitable et plus commune à toutes gens." [1] In the same century, the thirteenth, the French romance-writer, Christian of Troyes, formulates the claims, in chivalry and letters, of France, his native country, as follows: —

"Or vous ert par ce livre apris,
Que Gresse ot de chevalerie
Le premier los et de clergie;
Puis vint chevalerie à Rome,
Et de la clergie la some,
Qui ore est en France venue.
Diex doinst qu'ele i soit retenue,
Et que li lius li abelisse
Tant que de France n'isse
L'onor qui s'i est arestée!"

"Now by this book you will learn that first Greece had the renown for chivalry and letters: then chivalry and the primacy in

[1] [Converse in it is more pleasing to everybody and also more usual.]

letters passed to Rome, and now it is come to France. God grant it may be kept there; and that the place may please it so well, that the honour which has come to make stay in France may never depart thence!"

Yet it is now all gone, this French romance-poetry, of which the weight of substance and the power of style are not unfairly represented by this extract from Christian of Troyes. Only by means of the historic estimate can we persuade ourselves now to think that any of it is of poetical importance.

But in the fourteenth century there comes an Englishman nourished on this poetry, taught his trade by this poetry, getting words, rhyme, metre from this poetry; for even of that stanza which the Italians used, and which Chaucer derived immediately from the Italians, the basis and suggestion was probably given in France. Chaucer (I have already named him) fascinated his contemporaries, but so too did Christian of Troyes and Wolfram of Eschenbach. Chaucer's power of fascination, however, is enduring; his poetical importance does not need the assistance of the historic estimate; it is real. He is a genuine source of joy and strength, which is flowing still for us and will flow always. He will be read, as time goes on, far more generally than he is read now. His language is a cause of difficulty for us; but so also, and I think in quite as great a degree, is the language of Burns. In Chaucer's case, as in that of Burns, it is a difficulty to be unhesitatingly accepted and overcome.

If we ask ourselves wherein consists the immense superiority of Chaucer's poetry over the romance-poetry — why it is that in passing from this to Chaucer we suddenly feel ourselves to be in another world, we shall find that his superiority is both in the substance of his poetry and in the style of his poetry. His superiority in substance is given by his large, free, simple, clear yet kindly view of human life, — so unlike the total want, in the romance-poets, of all intelligent command of it. Chaucer has not their helplessness; he has gained the power to survey the world from a central, a truly human point of view. We have only to call to mind the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The right comment upon it is Dryden's: "It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that *here is God's plenty*." And again: "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense." It is by a large, free, sound representation of things, that poetry, this high criticism of life, has truth of substance; and Chaucer's poetry has truth of substance.

Of his style and manner, if we think first of the romance-poetry and then of Chaucer's divine liquidness of diction, his divine fluidity of movement, it is difficult to speak temperately. They are irresistible, and justify all the rapture with which his successors speak of his "gold dewdrops of speech." Johnson misses the point entirely when he finds fault with Dryden for ascribing to Chaucer the first refinement of our numbers, and says that Gower also can show smooth numbers and easy rhymes. The refinement of our numbers means something far more than this. A nation may have versifiers with smooth numbers and easy rhymes, and yet may have no real poetry at all. Chaucer is the father of our splendid English poetry; he is our "well of English undefiled," because by the lovely charm of his diction, the lovely charm of his movement, he makes an epoch and founds a tradition. In Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, we can follow the tradition of the liquid diction, the fluid movement, of Chaucer; at one time it is his liquid diction of which in these poets we feel the virtue, and at another time it is his fluid movement. And the virtue is irresistible.

Bounded as is my space, I must yet find room for an example of Chaucer's virtue, as I have given examples to show the virtue of the great classics. I feel disposed to say that a single line is enough to show the charm of Chaucer's verse; that merely one line like this —

"O martyr souded [1] in virginitee!"

has a virtue of manner and movement such as we shall not find in all the verse of romance-poetry; — but this is saying nothing. The virtue is such as we shall not find, perhaps, in all English poetry, outside the poets whom I have named as the special inheritors of Chaucer's tradition. A single line, however, is too little if we have not the strain of Chaucer's verse well in our memory; let us take a stanza. It is from *The Prioress's Tale*, the story of the Christian child murdered in a Jewry —

"My throte is cut unto my nekke-bone
Saidè this child, and as by way of kinde
I should have deyd, yea, longè time agone;
But Jesu Christ, as ye in bookès finde,
Will that his glory last and be in minde,
And for the worship of his mother dere
Yet may I sing *O Alma* loud and clere."

[1] The French *soudè;* soldered, fixed fast.

Wordsworth has modernized this Tale, and to feel how delicate and evanescent is the charm of verse, we have only to read Wordsworth's first three lines of this stanza after Chaucer's —

> "My throat is cut unto the bone, I trow
> Said this young child, and by the law of kind
> I should have died, yea, many hours ago."

The charm is departed. It is often said that the power of liquidness and fluidity in Chaucer's verse was dependent upon a free, a licentious dealing with language, such as is now impossible; upon a liberty, such as Burns too enjoyed, of making words like *neck*, *bird*, into a dissyllable by adding to them, and words like *cause*, *rhyme*, into a dissyllable by sounding the *e* mute. It is true that Chaucer's fluidity is conjoined with this liberty, and is admirably served by it; but we ought not to say that it was dependent upon it. It was dependent upon his talent. Other poets with a like liberty do not attain to the fluidity of Chaucer; Burns himself does not attain to it. Poets, again, who have a talent akin to Chaucer's, such as Shakespeare or Keats, have known how to attain to his fluidity without the like liberty.

And yet Chaucer is not one of the great classics. His poetry transcends and effaces, easily and without effort, all the romance-poetry of Catholic Christendom; it transcends and effaces all the English poetry contemporary with it, it transcends and effaces all the English poetry subsequent to it down to the age of Elizabeth. Of such avail is poetic truth of substance, in its natural and necessary union with poetic truth of style. And yet, I say, Chaucer is not one of the great classics. He has not their accent. What is wanting to him is suggested by the mere mention of the name of the first great classic of Christendom, the immortal poet who died eighty years before Chaucer, — Dante. The accent of such verse as

> "In la sua volontade è nostra pace . . ."

is altogether beyond Chaucer's reach; we praise him, but we feel that this accent is out of the question for him. It may be said that it was necessarily out of the reach of any poet in the England of that stage of growth. Possibly; but we are to adopt a real, not a historic, estimate of poetry. However we may account for its absence, something is wanting, then, to the poetry of Chaucer, which poetry must have before it can be placed in the glorious class of the best. And there is no doubt what that something is. It is the

σπουδαιότης, the high and excellent seriousness, which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of poetry. The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare's has it. It is this chiefly which gives to our spirits what they can rest upon; and with the increasing demands of our modern ages upon poetry, this virtue of giving us what we can rest upon will be more and more highly esteemed. A voice from the slums of Paris, fifty or sixty years after Chaucer, the voice of poor Villon out of his life of riot and crime, has at its happy moments (as, for instance, in the last stanza of *La Belle Heaulmière* [1]) more of this important poetic virtue of seriousness than all the productions of Chaucer. But its apparition in Villon, and in men like Villon, is fitful; the greatness of the great poets, the power of their criticism of life, is that their virtue is sustained.

To our praise, therefore, of Chaucer as a poet there must be this limitation; he lacks the high seriousness of the great classics, and therewith an important part of their virtue. Still, the main fact for us to bear in mind about Chaucer is his sterling value according to that real estimate which we firmly adopt for all poets. He has poetic truth of substance, though he has not high poetic seriousness, and corresponding to his truth of substance he has an exquisite virtue of style and manner. With him is born our real poetry.

For my present purpose I need not dwell on our Elizabethan poetry, or on the continuation and close of this poetry in Milton. We all of us profess to be agreed in the estimate of this poetry; we all of us recognize it as great poetry, our greatest, and Shake-

[1] The name *Heaulimière* is said to be derived from a headdress (helm) worn as a mark by courtesans. In Villon's ballad, a poor old creature of this class laments her days of youth and beauty. The last stanza of the ballad runs thus: —

"Ainsi le bon temps regretons
Entre nous, pauvres vieilles sottes,
Assises bas, à croppetons,
Tout en ung tas comme pelottes;
A petit feu de chenevottes
Tost allumées, tost estainctes.
Et jadis fusmes si mignottes!
Ainsi en prend à maintz et maintes."

"Thus amongst ourselves we regret the good time, poor silly old things, low-seated on our heels, all in a heap like so many balls; by a little fire of hemp-stalks, soon lighted, soon spent. And once we were such darlings! So fares it with many and many a one."

speare and Milton as our poetical classics. The real estimate, here, has universal currency. With the next age of our poetry divergency and difficulty begin. An historic estimate of that poetry has established itself; and the question is, whether it will be found to coincide with the real estimate.

The age of Dryden, together with our whole eighteenth century which followed it, sincerely believed itself to have produced poetical classics of its own, and even to have made advance, in poetry, beyond all its predecessors. Dryden regards as not seriously disputable the opinion "that the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by our fathers." Cowley could see nothing at all in Chaucer's poetry. Dryden heartily admired it, and, as we have seen, praised its matter admirably; but of its exquisite manner and movement all he can find to say is that "there is the rude sweetness of a Scotch tune in it, which is natural and pleasing, though not perfect." Addison, wishing to praise Chaucer's numbers, compares them with Dryden's own. And all through the eighteenth century, and down even into our own times, the stereotyped phrase of approbation for good verse found in our early poetry has been, that it even approached the verse of Dryden, Addison, Pope, and Johnson.

Are Dryden and Pope poetical classics? Is the historic estimate, which represents them as such, and which has been so long established that it cannot easily give way, the real estimate? Wordsworth and Coleridge, as is well known, denied it; but the authority of Wordsworth and Coleridge does not weigh much with the young generation, and there are many signs to show that the eighteenth century and its judgments are coming into favour again. Are the favourite poets of the eighteenth century classics?

It is impossible within my present limits to discuss the question fully. And what man of letters would not shrink from seeming to dispose dictatorially of the claims of two men who are, at any rate, such masters in letters as Dryden and Pope; two men of such admirable talent, both of them, and one of them, Dryden, a man, on all sides, of such energetic and genial power? And yet, if we are to gain the full benefit from poetry, we must have the real estimate of it. I cast about for some mode of arriving, in the present case, at such an estimate without offence. And perhaps the best way is to begin, as it is easy to begin, with cordial praise.

When we find Chapman, the Elizabethan translator of Homer, expressing himself in his preface thus: "Though truth in her very nakedness sits in so deep a pit, that from Gades to Aurora and Ganges few eyes can sound her, I hope yet those few here will so discover and confirm that, the date being out of her darkness in this morning of our poet, he shall now gird his temples with the sun," — we pronounce that such a prose is intolerable. When we find Milton writing: "And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he, who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem," — we pronounce that such a prose has its own grandeur, but that it is obsolete and inconvenient. But when we find Dryden telling us: "What Virgil wrote in the vigour of his age, in plenty and at ease, I have undertaken to translate in my declining years; struggling with wants, oppressed with sickness, curbed in my genius, liable to be misconstrued in all I write," — then we exclaim that here at last we have the true English prose, a prose such as we would all gladly use if we only knew how. Yet Dryden was Milton's contemporary.

But after the Restoration the time had come when our nation felt the imperious need of a fit prose. So, too, the time had likewise come when our nation felt the imperious need of freeing itself from the absorbing preoccupation which religion in the Puritan age had exercised. It was impossible that this freedom should be brought about without some negative excess, without some neglect and impairment of the religious life of the soul; and the spiritual history of the eighteenth century shows us that the freedom was not achieved without them. Still, the freedom was achieved; the preoccupation, an undoubtedly baneful and retarding one if it had continued, was got rid of. And as with religion amongst us at that period, so it was also with letters. A fit prose was a necessity; but it was impossible that a fit prose should establish itself amongst us without some touch of frost to the imaginative life of the soul. The needful qualities for a fit prose are regularity, uniformity, precision, balance. The men of letters, whose destiny it may be to bring their nation to the attainment of a fit prose, must of necessity, whether they work in prose or in verse, give a predominating, an almost exclusive attention to the qualities of regularity, uniformity, precision, balance. But an almost exclusive attention to these qualities involves some repression and silencing of poetry.

We are to regard Dryden as the puissant and glorious founder, Pope as the splendid high priest, of our age of prose and reason, of our excellent and indispensable eighteenth century. For the purposes of their mission and destiny their poetry, like their prose, is admirable. Do you ask me whether Dryden's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good?

> "A milk-white Hind, immortal and unchanged,
> Fed on the lawns and in the forest ranged."

I answer: Admirable for the purposes of the inaugurator of an age of prose and reason. Do you ask me whether Pope's verse, take it almost where you will, is not good?

> "To Hounslow Heath I point, and Banstead Down;
> Thence comes your mutton, and these chicks my own."

I answer: Admirable for the purposes of the high priest of an age of prose and reason. But do you ask me whether such verse proceeds from men with an adequate poetic criticism of life, from men whose criticism of life has a high seriousness, or even, without that high seriousness, has poetic largeness, freedom, insight, benignity? Do you ask me whether the application of ideas to life in the verse of these men, often a powerful application, no doubt, is a powerful *poetic* application? Do you ask me whether the poetry of these men has either the matter or the inseparable manner of such an adequate poetic criticism; whether it has the accent of

> "Absent thee from felicity awhile . . ."

or of

> "And what is else not to be overcome . . ."

or of

> "O martyr souded in virginitee!"

I answer: It has not and cannot have them; it is the poetry of the builders of an age of prose and reason. Though they may write in verse, though they may in a certain sense be masters of the art of versification, Dryden and Pope are not classics of our poetry, they are classics of our prose.

Gray is our poetical classic of that literature and age; the position of Gray is singular, and demands a word of notice here. He has not the volume or the power of poets who, coming in times

more favourable, have attained to an independent criticism of life. But he lived with great poets, he lived, above all, with the Greeks, through perpetually studying and enjoying them; and he caught their poetic point of view for regarding life, caught their poetic manner. The point of view and the manner are not self-sprung in him, he caught them of others; and he had not the free and abundant use of them. But whereas Addison and Pope never had the use of them, Gray had the use of them at times. He is the scantiest and frailest of classics in our poetry, but he is a classic.

And now, after Gray, we are met, as we draw towards the end of the eighteenth century, we are met by the great name of Burns. We enter now on times where the personal estimate of poets begins to be rife, and where the real estimate of them is not reached without difficulty. But in spite of the disturbing pressure of personal partiality, of national partiality, let us try to reach a real estimate of the poetry of Burns.

By his English poetry Burns in general belongs to the eighteenth century, and has little importance for us.

> "Mark ruffian Violence, distain'd with crimes,
> Rousing elate in these degenerate times;
> View unsuspecting Innocence a prey,
> As guileful Fraud points out the erring way;
> While subtile Litigation's pliant tongue
> The life-blood equal sucks of Right and Wrong!"

Evidently this is not the real Burns, or his name and fame would have disappeared long ago. Nor is Clarinda's love-poet, Sylvander, the real Burns either. But he tells us himself: "These English songs gravel me to death. I have not the command of the language that I have of my native tongue. In fact, I think that my ideas are more barren in English than in Scotch. I have been at *Duncan Gray* to dress it in English, but all I can do is desperately stupid." We English turn naturally, in Burns, to the poems in our own language, because we can read them easily; but in those poems we have not the real Burns.

The real Burns is of course in his Scotch poems. Let us boldly say that of much of this poetry, a poetry dealing perpetually with Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, a Scotchman's estimate is apt to be personal. A Scotchman is used to this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners;

he has a tenderness for it; he meets its poet halfway. In this tender mood he reads pieces like the *Holy Fair* or *Halloween.* But this world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners is against a poet, not for him, when it is not a partial countryman who reads him; for in itself it is not a beautiful world, and no one can deny that it is of advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world. Burns's world of Scotch drink, Scotch religion, and Scotch manners, is often a harsh, a sordid, a repulsive world; even the world of his *Cotter's Saturday Night* is not a beautiful world. No doubt a poet's criticism of life may have such truth and power that it triumphs over its world and delights us. Burns may triumph over his world, often he does triumph over his world, but let us observe how and where. Burns is the first case we have had where the bias of the personal estimate tends to mislead; let us look at him closely, he can bear it.

Many of his admirers will tell us that we have Burns, convivial, genuine, delightful, here —

> "Leeze me on drink! it gies us mair
> Than either school or college;
> It kindles wit, it waukens lair,
> It pangs us fou o' knowledge.
> Be't whisky gill or penny wheep
> Or ony stronger potion,
> It never fails, on drinking deep,
> To kittle up our notion
> By night or day."

There is a great deal of that sort of thing in Burns, and it is unsatisfactory, not because it is bacchanalian poetry, but because it has not that accent of sincerity which bacchanalian poetry, to do it justice, very often has. There is something in it of bravado, something which makes us feel that we have not the man speaking to us with his real voice; something, therefore, poetically unsound.

With still more confidence will his admirers tell us that we have the genuine Burns, the great poet, when his strain asserts the independence, equality, dignity, of men, as in the famous song *For a' that and a' that* —

> "A prince can mak' a belted knight,
> A marquis, duke, and a' that;
> But an honest man's aboon his might,
> Guid faith he mauna fa' that!

For a' that, and a' that,
Their dignities, and a' that,
The pith o' sense, and pride o' worth,
Are higher rank than a' that."

Here they find his grand, genuine touches; and still more, when this puissant genius, who so often set morality at defiance, falls moralizing —

"The sacred lowe o' weel-placed love
Luxuriantly indulge it;
But never tempt th' illicit rove,
Tho' naething should divulge it.
I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard o' concealing,
But och! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling."

or in a higher strain —

"Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us;
He knows each chord, its various tone;
Each spring, its various bias.
Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it;
What's *done* we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted."

Or in a better strain yet, a strain, his admirers will say, unsurpassable —

"To make a happy fire-side clime
To weans and wife,
That's the true pathos and sublime
Of human life."

There is criticism of life for you, the admirers of Burns will say to us; there is the application of ideas to life! There is, undoubtedly. The doctrine of the last quoted lines coincides almost exactly with what was the aim and end, Xenophon tells us, of all the teaching of Socrates. And the application is a powerful one; made by a man of vigorous understanding, and (need I say?) a master of language.

But for supreme poetical success more is required than the powerful application of ideas to life; it must be an application under the conditions fixed by the laws of poetic truth and poetic

beauty. Those laws fix as an essential condition, in the poet's treatment of such matters as are here in question, high seriousness; — the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity. The accent of high seriousness, born of absolute sincerity, is what gives to such verse as

"In la sua volontade è nostra pace . . ."

to such criticism of life as Dante's, its power. Is this accent felt in the passages which I have been quoting from Burns? Surely not; surely, if our sense is quick, we must perceive that we have not in those passages a voice from the very inmost soul of the genuine Burns; he is not speaking to us from these depths, he is more or less preaching. And the compensation for admiring such passages less, from missing the perfect poetic accent in them, will be that we shall admire more the poetry where that accent is found.

No; Burns, like Chaucer, comes short of the high seriousness of the great classics, and the virtue of matter and manner which goes with that high seriousness is wanting to his work. At moments he touches it in a profound and passionate melancholy, as in those four immortal lines taken by Byron as a motto for *The Bride of Abydos*, but which have in them a depth of poetic quality such as resides in no verse of Byron's own —

"Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met, or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted."

But a whole poem of that quality Burns cannot make; the rest, in the *Farewell to Nancy*, is verbiage.

We arrive best at the real estimate of Burns, I think, by conceiving his work as having truth of matter and truth of manner, but not the accent or the poetic virtue of the highest masters. His genuine criticism of life, when the sheer poet in him speaks, is ironic; it is not —

"Thou Power Supreme, whose mighty scheme
These woes of mine fulfil,
Here firm I rest, they must be best
Because they are Thy will!"

It is far rather: *Whistle owre the lave o't!* Yet we may say of him as of Chaucer, that of life and the world, as they come before

him, his view is large, free, shrewd, benignant, — truly poetic, therefore; and his manner of rendering what he sees is to match. But we must note, at the same time, his great difference from Chaucer. The freedom of Chaucer is heightened, in Burns, by a fiery, reckless energy; the benignity of Chaucer deepens, in Burns, into an overwhelming sense of the pathos of things; — of the pathos of human nature, the pathos, also, of non-human nature. Instead of the fluidity of Chaucer's manner, the manner of Burns has spring, bounding swiftness. Burns is by far the greater force, though he has perhaps less charm. The world of Chaucer is fairer, richer, more significant than that of Burns; but when the largeness and freedom of Burns get full sweep, as in *Tam o' Shanter*, or still more in that puissant and splendid production, *The Jolly Beggars*, his world may be what it will, his poetic genius triumphs over it. In the world of *The Jolly Beggars* there is more than hideousness and squalor, there is bestiality; yet the piece is a superb poetic success. It has a breadth, truth, and power which make the famous scene in Auerbach's Cellar, of Goethe's *Faust*, seem artificial and tame beside it, and which are only matched by Shakespeare and Aristophanes.

Here, where his largeness and freedom serve him so admirably, and also in those poems and songs where to shrewdness he adds infinite archness and wit, and to benignity infinite pathos, where his manner is flawless, and a perfect poetic whole is the result, — in things like the address to the mouse whose home he had ruined, in things like *Duncan Gray*, *Tam Glen*, *Whistle and I'll come to you my Lad*, *Auld Lang Syne* (this list might be made much longer), — here we have the genuine Burns, of whom the real estimate must be high indeed. Not a classic, nor with the excellent σπουδαιότης of the great classics, nor with a verse rising to a criticism of life and a virtue like theirs; but a poet with thorough truth of substance and an answering truth of style, giving us a poetry sound to the core. We all of us have a leaning towards the pathetic, and may be inclined perhaps to prize Burns most for his touches of piercing, sometimes almost intolerable, pathos; for verse like —

> "We twa hae paidl't i' the burn
> From mornin' sun till dine;
> But seas between us braid hae roar'd
> Sin auld lang syne . . ."

where he is as lovely as he is sound. But perhaps it is by the perfection of soundness of his lighter and archer masterpieces that he is poetically most wholesome for us. For the votary misled by a personal estimate of Shelley, as so many of us have been, are, and will be, — of that beautiful spirit building his many-coloured haze of words and images

"Pinnacled dim in the intense inane" —

no contact can be wholesomer than the contact with Burns at his archest and soundest. Side by side with the

"On the brink of the night and the morning
My coursers are wont to respire,
But the Earth has just whispered a warning
That their flight must be swifter than fire . . ."

of *Prometheus Unbound*, how salutary, how very salutary, to place this from *Tam Glen* —

"My minnie does constantly deave me
And bids me beware o' young men;
They flatter, she says, to deceive me;
But wha can think sae o' Tam Glen?"

But we enter on burning ground as we approach the poetry of times so near to us — poetry like that of Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth — of which the estimates are so often not only personal, but personal with passion. For my purpose, it is enough to have taken the single case of Burns, the first poet we come to of whose work the estimate formed is evidently apt to be personal, and to have suggested how we may proceed, using the poetry of the great classics as a sort of touchstone, to correct this estimate, as we had previously corrected by the same means the historic estimate where we met with it. A collection like the present, with its succession of celebrated names and celebrated poems, offers a good opportunity to us for resolutely endeavouring to make our estimates of poetry real. I have sought to point out a method which will help us in making them so, and to exhibit it in use so far as to put any one who likes in a way of applying it for himself.

At any rate the end to which the method and the estimate are designed to lead, and from leading to which, if they do lead to it, they get their whole value, — the benefit of being able clearly to feel and deeply to enjoy the best, the truly classic, in poetry, — is an end, let me say it once more at parting, of supreme impor-

tance. We are often told that an era is opening in which we are to see multitudes of a common sort of readers, and masses of a common sort of literature; that such readers do not want and could not relish anything better than such literature, and that to provide it is becoming a vast and profitable industry. Even if good literature entirely lost currency with the world, it would still be abundantly worth while to continue to enjoy it by oneself. But it never will lose currency with the world, in spite of momentary appearances; it never will lose supremacy. Currency and supremacy are insured to it, not indeed by the world's deliberate and conscious choice, but by something far deeper, — by the instinct of self-preservation in humanity.

XIV

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

(1772–1834)

ON POETRY AND POETIC POWER

[Chapters XIV. and XV. of *Biographia Literaria*, 1817.]

During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversation turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunset, diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature. The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves.

In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads;* in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that

willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.

With this view I wrote the *Ancient Mariner*, and was preparing, among other poems, the *Dark Ladie*, and the *Christabel*, in which I should have more nearly realized my ideal than I had done in my first attempt. But Mr. Wordsworth's industry had proved so much more successful, and the number of his poems so much greater, that my compositions, instead of forming a balance, appeared rather an interpolation of heterogeneous matter. Mr. Wordsworth added two or three poems written in his own character, in the impassioned, lofty, and sustained diction which is characteristic of his genius. In this form the *Lyrical Ballads* were published; and were presented by him, as an experiment, whether subjects, which from their nature rejected the usual ornaments and extra-colloquial style of poems in general, might not be so managed in the language of ordinary life as to produce the pleasurable interest which it is the peculiar business of poetry to impart. To the second edition he added a preface of considerable length; in which, notwithstanding some passages of apparently a contrary import, he was understood to contend for the extension of this style to poetry of all kinds, and to reject as vicious and indefensible all phrases and forms of style that were not included in what he (unfortunately, I think, adopting an equivocal expression) called the language of real life. From this preface, prefixed to poems in which it was impossible to deny the presence of original genius, however mistaken its direction might be deemed, arose the whole long-continued controversy. For from the conjunction of perceived power with supposed heresy I explain the inveteracy, and in some instances, I grieve to say, the acrimonious passions, with which the controversy has been conducted by the assailants.

Had Mr. Wordsworth's poems been the silly, the childish things which they were for a long time described as being; had they been really distinguished from the compositions of other poets merely by meanness of language and inanity of thought; had they indeed

contained nothing more than what is found in the parodies and pretended imitations of them; they must have sunk at once, a dead weight, into the slough of oblivion, and have dragged the preface along with them. But year after year increased the number of Mr. Wordsworth's admirers. They were found, too, not in the lower classes of the reading public, but chiefly among young men of strong sensibility and meditative minds; and their admiration (inflamed perhaps in some degree by opposition) was distinguished by its intensity, I might almost say, by its religious fervour. These facts, and the intellectual energy of the author, which was more or less consciously felt, where it was outwardly and even boisterously denied, meeting with sentiments of aversion to his opinions, and of alarm at their consequences, produced an eddy of criticism, which would of itself have borne up the poems by the violence with which it whirled them round and round. With many parts of this preface, in the sense attributed to them, and which the words undoubtedly seem to authorize, I never concurred; but, on the contrary, objected to them as erroneous in principle, and as contradictory (in appearance at least) both to other parts of the same preface and to the author's own practice in the greater number of the poems themselves. Mr. Wordsworth, in his recent collection, has, I find, degraded this prefatory disquisition to the end of his second volume, to be read or not at the reader's choice. But he has not, as far as I can discover, announced any change in his poetic creed. At all events, considering it as the source of a controversy, in which I have been honoured more than I deserve by the frequent conjunction of my name with his, I think it expedient to declare, once for all, in what points I coincide with his opinions, and in what points I altogether differ. But in order to render myself intelligible, I must previously, in as few words as possible, explain my ideas, first, of a poem; and secondly, of poetry itself, in kind and in essence.

The office of philosophical disquisition consists in just distinction; while it is the privilege of the philosopher to preserve himself constantly aware that distinction is not division. In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is the technical process of philosophy. But having so done, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity in which they actually coexist; and this is the result of philosophy.

A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition;

the difference, therefore, must consist in a different combination of them, in consequence of a different object proposed. According to the difference of the object will be the difference of the combination. It is possible that the object may be merely to facilitate the recollection of any given facts or observations by artificial arrangement; and the composition will be a poem, merely because it is distinguished from prose by metre, or by rhyme, or by both conjointly. In this, the lowest sense, a man might attribute the name of a poem to the well-known enumeration of the days in the several months —

> Thirty days hath September,
> April, June, and November, etc.

and others of the same class and purpose. And as a particular pleasure is found in anticipating the recurrence of sounds and quantities, all compositions that have this charm superadded, whatever be their contents, *may* be entitled poems.

So much for the superficial form. A difference of object and contents supplies an additional ground of distinction. The immediate purpose may be the communication of truths; either of truth absolute and demonstrable, as in works of science; or of facts experienced and recorded, as in history. Pleasure, and that of the highest and most permanent kind, may result from the attainment of the end; but it is not itself the immediate end. In other works the communication of pleasure may be the immediate purpose; and though truth, either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end, yet this will distinguish the character of the author, not the class to which the work belongs. Blest indeed is that state of society, in which the immediate purpose would be baffled by the perversion of the proper ultimate end; in which no charm of diction or imagery could exempt the Bathyllus even of an Anacreon, or the Alexis of Virgil, from disgust and aversion!

But the communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a work not metrically composed; and that object may have been in a high degree attained, as in novels and romances. Would then the mere superaddition of metre, with or without rhyme, entitle these to the name of poems? The answer is, that nothing can permanently please which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If metre be superadded, all other parts must be made consonant with it. They must be such as to justify the perpetual and distinct attention to each part, which an

exact correspondent recurrence of accent and sound are calculated to excite. The final definition then, so deduced, may be thus worded. A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part.

Controversy is not seldom excited in consequence of the disputants attaching each a different meaning to the same word; and in few instances has this been more striking than in disputes concerning the present subject. If a man chooses to call every composition a poem which is rhyme, or measure, or both, I must leave his opinion uncontroverted. The distinction is at least competent to characterize the writer's intention. If it were subjoined that the whole is likewise entertaining or affecting, as a tale, or as a series of interesting reflections, I of course admit this as another fit ingredient of a poem, and an additional merit. But if the definition sought for be that of a legitimate poem, I answer, it must be one the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement. The philosophic critics of all ages coincide with the ultimate judgment of all countries, in equally denying the praises of a just poem, on the one hand to a series of striking lines or distichs, each of which, absorbing the whole attention of the reader to itself, disjoins it from its context, and makes it a separate whole, instead of a harmonizing part; and on the other hand, to an unsustained composition, from which the reader collects rapidly the general result unattracted by the component parts. The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air, at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward. *Præcipitandus est liber spiritus*,[1] says Petronius Arbiter most happily. The epithet, *liber*, here balances the preceding verb,

[1] [The unrestrained spirit must go headlong.]

and it is not easy to conceive more meaning condensed in fewer words.

But if this should be admitted as a satisfactory character of a poem, we have still to seek for a definition of poetry. The writings of Plato and Bishop Taylor, and the *Theoria Sacra* of Burnet, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistinguishing objects of a poem. The first chapter of Isaiah (indeed a very large proportion of the whole book) is poetry in the most emphatic sense; yet it would be not less irrational than strange to assert that pleasure, and not truth, was the immediate object of the prophet. In short, whatever specific import we attach to the word poetry, there will be found involved in it, as a necessary consequence, that a poem of any length neither can be, nor ought to be, all poetry. Yet if a harmonious whole is to be produced, the remaining parts must be preserved in keeping with the poetry; and this can be no otherwise effected than by such a studied selection and artificial arrangement as will partake of one, though not a peculiar, property of poetry. And this again can be no other than the property of exciting a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose aims at, whether colloquial or written.

My own conclusions on the nature of poetry, in the strictest use of the word, have been in part anticipated in the preceding disquisition on the fancy and imagination. What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other. For it is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind. The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control (*laxis effertur habenis*),[1] reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual,

[1] [He holds the reins lightly.]

with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature, the manner to the matter, and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry. Doubtless, as Sir John Davies observes of the soul (and his words may with slight alteration be applied, and even more appropriately, to the poetic imagination) —

> Doubtless this could not be, but that she turns
> Bodies to spirit by sublimation strange,
> As fire converts to fire the things it burns,
> As we our food into our nature change.
>
> From their gross matter she abstracts their forms,
> And draws a kind of quintessence from things;
> Which to her proper nature she transforms
> To bear them light on her celestial wings.
>
> Thus does she, when from individual states
> She doth abstract the universal kinds;
> Which then re-clothed in divers names and fates
> Steal access through our senses to our minds.

Finally, good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its drapery, motion its life, and imagination the soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

In the application of these principles to purposes of practical criticism as employed in the appraisal of works more or less imperfect, I have endeavoured to discover what the qualities in a poem are, which may be deemed promises and specific symptoms of poetic power, as distinguished from general talent determined to poetic composition by accidental motives, by an act of the will, rather than by the inspiration of a genial and productive nature. In this investigation, I could not, I thought, do better than keep before me the earliest work of the greatest genius that perhaps human nature has yet produced, our myriad-minded Shakespeare. I mean the *Venus and Adonis*, and the *Lucrece;* works which give at once strong promises of the strength, and yet obvious proofs of the immaturity, of his genius. From these I abstracted the following marks, as characteristics of original poetic genius in general.

1. In the *Venus and Adonis* the first and obvious excellence is the perfect sweetness of the versification, its adaptation to the subject, and the power displayed in varying the march of the words without passing into a loftier and more majestic rhythm than was demanded by the thoughts, or permitted by the propriety of preserving a sense of melody predominant. The delight in richness and sweetness of sound, even to a faulty excess, if it be evidently original, and not the result of an easily imitable mechanism, I regard as a highly favourable promise in the compositions of a young man. "The man that hath not music in his soul" can indeed never be a genuine poet. Imagery (even taken from nature, much more when transplanted from books, as travels, voyages, and works of natural history), affecting incidents, just thoughts, interesting personal or domestic feelings, and with these the art of their combination or intertexture in the form of a poem, may all by incessant effort be acquired as a trade, by a man of talents and much reading, who, as I once before observed, has mistaken an intense desire of poetic reputation for a natural poetic genius; the love of the arbitrary end for a possession of the peculiar means. But the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination; and this, together with the power of reducing multitude into unity of effect, and modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling, may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learnt. It is in these that *Poeta nascitur non fit.*[1]

2. A second promise of genius is the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. At least I have found that where the subject is taken immediately from the author's personal sensations and experiences, the excellence of a particular poem is but an equivocal mark, and often a fallacious pledge, of genuine poetic power. We may perhaps remember the tale of the statuary, who had acquired considerable reputation for the legs of his goddesses, though the rest of the statue accorded but indifferently with ideal beauty; till his wife, elated by her husband's praises, modestly acknowledged that she herself had been his constant model. In the *Venus and Adonis* this proof of poetic power exists even to excess. It is throughout as if a superior spirit, more intuitive, more intimately conscious even than the characters themselves, not only of every outward look and act, but of the flux and reflux of the mind in all its subtlest

[1] [The poet is born, not made.]

thoughts and feelings, were placing the whole before our view; himself meanwhile unparticipating in the passions, and actuated only by that pleasurable excitement which had resulted from the energetic fervour of his own spirit, in so vividly exhibiting what it had so accurately and profoundly contemplated. I think I should have conjectured from these poems that even then the great instinct which impelled the poet to the drama was secretly working in him, prompting him by a series and never-broken chain of imagery, always vivid, and because unbroken, often minute; by the highest effort of the picturesque in words, of which words are capable, higher perhaps than was ever realized by any other poet, even Dante not excepted; to provide a substitute for that visual language, that constant intervention and running comment by tone, look, and gesture, which, in his dramatic works, he was entitled to expect from the players. His Venus and Adonis seem at once the characters themselves, and the whole representation of those characters by the most consummate actors. You seem to be told nothing, but to see and hear everything. Hence it is that from the perpetual activity of attention required on the part of the reader; from the rapid flow, the quick change, and the playful nature of the thoughts and images; and, above all, from the alienation, and, if I may hazard such an expression, the utter aloofness of the poet's own feelings from those of which he is at once the painter and the analyst; that, though the very subject cannot but detract from the pleasure of a delicate mind, yet never was poem less dangerous on a moral account. Instead of doing as Ariosto, and as, still more offensively, Wieland has done; instead of degrading and deforming passion into appetite, the trials of love into the struggles of concupiscence, Shakespeare has here represented the animal impulse itself so as to preclude all sympathy with it, by dissipating the reader's notice among the thousand outward images, and now beautiful, now fanciful circumstances, which form its dresses and its scenery; or by diverting our attention from the main subject by those frequent witty or profound reflections which the poet's ever active mind has deduced from, or connected with, the imagery and the incidents. The reader is forced into too much action to sympathize with the merely passive of our nature. As little can a mind thus roused and awakened be brooded on by mean and instinct emotion, as the low, lazy mist can creep upon the surface of a lake while a strong gale is driving it onward in waves and billows.

3. It has been before observed that images, however beautiful,

though faithfully copied from nature, and as accurately represented in words, do not of themselves characterize the poet. They become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity, or succession to an instant; or, lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit,

> Which shoots its being through earth, sea, and air.

In the two following lines, for instance, there is nothing objectionable, nothing which would preclude them from forming, in their proper place, part of a descriptive poem: —

> Behold yon row of pines, that shorn and bow'd
> Bend from the sea-blast, seen at twilight eve.

But with the small alteration of rhythm, the same words would be equally in their place in a book of topography, or in a descriptive tour. The same image will rise into a semblance of poetry if thus conveyed: —

> Yon row of bleak and visionary pines,
> By twilight-glimpse discerned, mark! how they flee
> From the fierce sea-blast, all their tresses wild
> Streaming before them.

I have given this as an illustration, by no means as an instance, of that particular excellence which I had in view, and in which Shakespeare, even in his earliest as in his latest works, surpasses all other poets. It is by this that he still gives a dignity and a passion to the objects which he presents. Unaided by any previous excitement, they burst upon us at once in life and in power.

> Full many a glorious morning have I seen
> *Flatter* the mountain-tops with sovereign eye. — *Sonnet* 33.

> Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
> Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,
> Can yet the lease of my true love control,
> Supposed as forfeit to a confined doom.
> The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured,
> And the sad augurs mock their own presage:
> Incertainties now crown themselves assured,
> And peace proclaims olives of endless age.

Now with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh: and Death to me subscribes,
Since, spite of him, I'll live in this poor rhyme,
While he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes.
And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.
— *Sonnet* 107.

As of higher worth, so doubtless still more characteristic of poetic genius does the imagery become, when it moulds and colours itself to the circumstances, passion, or character, present and foremost in the mind. For unrivalled instances of this excellence the reader's own memory will refer him to the *Lear*, *Othello*, in short, to which not of the "*great, ever living, dead man's*" dramatic works? *Inopem me copia fecit.*[1] How true it is to nature, he has himself finely expressed in the instance of love in *Sonnet* 98: —

From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April drest in all his trim
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing,
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him.

Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew;
Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;
They were, but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
Yet seem'd it winter still and, you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play!

Scarcely less sure, or if a less valuable, not less indispensable mark

Γονίμου μὲν Ποιητοῦ ————————
———————— ὅστις ῥῆμα γενναῖον λάκοι,[2]

will the imagery supply when, with more than the power of the painter, the poet gives us the liveliest image of succession with the feeling of simultaneousness!

[1] [Abundance has made me poor.]
[2] [There's not one hearty Poet amongst them all
That's fit to risque an adventurous valiant phrase.
— Frere's translation of Aristophanes's *Frogs*.]

With this he breaketh from the sweet embrace
Of those fair arms, that bound him to her breast,
And homeward through the dark laund runs apace:
Look how a bright star shooteth from the sky!
So glides he in the night from Venus' eye. — *Venus and Adonis*, l. 811.

4. The last character I shall mention, which would prove indeed but little, except as taken conjointly with the former; yet without which the former could scarce exist in a high degree, and (even if this were possible) would give promises only of transitory flashes and a meteoric power; — its depth and energy of thought. No man was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher. For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language. In Shakespeare's Poems the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace. Each in its excess of strength seems to threaten the extinction of the other. At length, in the drama they were reconciled, and fought each with its shield before the breast of the other. Or like two rapid streams that, at their first meeting within narrow and rocky banks, mutually strive to repel each other, and intermix reluctantly and in tumult, but soon finding a wider channel and more yielding shores, blend and dilate, and flow on in one current and with one voice. The *Venus and Adonis* did not perhaps allow the display of the deeper passions. But the story of Lucretia seems to favour, and even demand, their intensest workings. And yet we find in Shakespeare's management of the tale neither pathos nor any other dramatic quality. There is the same minute and faithful imagery as in the former poem, in the same vivid colours, inspirited by the same impetuous vigour of thought, and diverging and contracting with the same activity of the assimilative and of the modifying faculties; and with a yet larger display, a yet wider range of knowledge and reflection; and lastly, with the same perfect dominion, often domination, over the whole world of language. What, then, shall we say? even this, that Shakespeare, no mere child of nature; no automaton of genius; no passive vehicle of inspiration possessed by the spirit, not possessing it; first studied patiently, meditated deeply, understood minutely, till knowledge, become habitual and intuitive, wedded itself to his habitual feelings, and at length gave birth to that stupendous power, by which he stands alone, with no equal or second in his own class; to that power which seated him on one of the two glory-smitten summits of

the poetic mountain, with Milton as his compeer, not rival. While the former darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion, the one Proteus of the fire and the flood; the other attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own ideal. All things and modes of action shape themselves anew in the being of Milton; while Shakespeare becomes all things, yet forever remaining himself. O what great men hast thou not produced, England, my country! Truly, indeed,

> Must we be free or die, who speak the tongue,
> Which Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold,
> Which Milton held. In everything we are sprung
> Of earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

XV

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

(1792–1822)

A DEFENCE OF POETRY

[An answer written in 1821, to Peacock's lively essay, *The Four Ages of Poetry* (*Ollier's Literary Magazine*, 1820) and intended for the *Liberal*, but first published by Mrs. Shelley in the *Essays*, 1840.]

ACCORDING to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action, which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity. The one is the τὸ ποιεῖν, or the principle of synthesis, and has for its objects those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself; the other is the τὸ λογίζειν, or principle of analysis, and its action regards the relations of things simply as relations; considering thoughts, not in their integral unity, but as the algebraical representations which conduct to certain general results. Reason is the enumeration of qualities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitudes of things. Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.

Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the imagination": and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing

wind over an Æolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre. A child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every inflection of tone and every gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it; it will be the reflected image of that impression; and as the lyre trembles and sounds after the wind has died away, so the child seeks, by prolonging in its voice and motions the duration of the effect, to prolong also a consciousness of the cause. In relation to the objects which delight a child, these expressions are what poetry is to higher objects. The savage (for the savage is to ages what the child is to years) expresses the emotions produced in him by surrounding objects in a similar manner; and language and gesture, together with plastic or pictorial imitation, become the image of the combined effect of those objects, and of his apprehension of them. Man in society, with all his passions and his pleasures, next becomes the object of the passions and pleasures of man; an additional class of emotions produces an augmented treasure of expressions; and language, gesture, and the imitative arts become at once the representation and the medium, the pencil and the picture, the chisel and the statue, the chord and the harmony. The social sympathies, or those laws from which, as from its elements, society results, begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist; the future is contained within the present, as the plant within the seed: and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence, become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action, inasmuch as he is social; and constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind. Hence men, even in the infancy of society, observe a certain order in their words and actions, distinct from that of the objects and the impressions represented by them, all expression being subject to the laws of that from

which it proceeds. But let us dismiss those more general considerations which might involve an inquiry into the principles of society itself, and restrict our view to the manner in which the imagination is expressed upon its forms.

In the youth of the world, men dance and sing and imitate natural objects, observing in these actions, as in all others, a certain rhythm or order. And, although all men observe a similar, they observe not the same order, in the motions of the dance, in the melody of the song, in the combinations of language, in the series of their imitations of natural objects. For there is a certain order or rhythm belonging to each of these classes of mimetic representation, from which the hearer and the spectator receive an intenser and purer pleasure than from any other: the sense of an approximation to this order has been called taste by modern writers. Every man in the infancy of art observes an order which approximates more or less closely to that from which this highest delight results; but the diversity is not sufficiently marked, as that its gradations should be sensible, except in those instances where the predominance of this faculty of approximation to the beautiful (for so we may be permitted to name the relation between this highest pleasure and its cause) is very great. Those in whom it exists in excess are poets, in the most universal sense of the word; and the pleasure resulting from the manner in which they express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community. Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them, become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then, if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse. These similitudes or relations are finely said by Lord Bacon to be "the same footsteps of nature impressed upon the various subjects of the world"[1] — and he considers the faculty which perceives them as the storehouse of axioms common to all knowledge. In the infancy of society every author is necessarily a poet, because language itself is poetry; and to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful; in a word, the good which exists in the relation subsisting, first be-

[1] *De Augment. Scient.*, cap. 1, lib. iii.

tween existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression. Every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem: the copiousness of lexicography and the distinctions of grammar are the works of a later age, and are merely the catalogue and the form of the creations of poetry.

But poets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting: they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion. Hence all original religions are allegorical, or susceptible of allegory, and, like Janus, have a double face of false and true. Poets, according to the circumstances of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called, in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators, or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time. Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of the word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events: such is the pretence of superstition, which would make poetry an attribute of prophecy rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry. A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not. The grammatical forms which express the moods of time, and the difference of persons, and the distinction of place, are convertible with respect to the highest poetry without injuring it as poetry; and the choruses of Æschylus, and the book of Job, and Dante's Paradise, would afford, more than any other writings, examples of this fact, if the limits of this essay did not forbid citation. The creations of sculpture, painting, and music are illustrations still more decisive.

Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action are all the instruments and materials of poetry; they may be called poetry by that figure of speech which considers the effect as a synonym of the cause. But poetry in a more restricted sense

expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man. And this springs from the nature itself of language, which is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations than colour, form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty of which it is the creation. For language is arbitrarily produced by the imagination, and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments, and conditions of art have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression. The former is as a mirror which reflects, the latter as a cloud which enfeebles, the light of which both are mediums of communication. Hence the fame of sculptors, painters, and musicians, although the intrinsic powers of the great masters of these arts may yield in no degree to that of those who have employed language as the hieroglyphic of their thoughts, has never equalled that of poets in the restricted sense of the term; as two performers of equal skill will produce unequal effects from a guitar and a harp. The fame of legislators and founders of religions, so long as their institutions last, alone seems to exceed that of poets in the restricted sense; but it can scarcely be a question whether, if we deduct the celebrity which their flattery of the gross opinions of the vulgar usually conciliates, together with that which belonged to them in their higher character of poets, any excess will remain.

We have thus circumscribed the word poetry within the limits of that art which is the most familiar and the most perfect expression of the faculty itself. It is necessary, however, to make the circle still narrower, and to determine the distinction between measured and unmeasured language; for the popular division into prose and verse is inadmissible in accurate philosophy.

Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations has always been found connected with a perception of the order of the relations of thoughts. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence than the words themselves, without reference to that peculiar order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were

as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower — and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel.

An observation of the regular mode of the recurrence of harmony in the language of poetical minds, together with its relation to music, produced metre, or a certain system of traditional forms of harmony and language. Yet it is by no means essential that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that the harmony, which is its spirit, be observed. The practice is indeed convenient and popular, and to be preferred, especially in such composition as includes much action: but every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification. The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error. The distinction between philosophers and poets has been anticipated. Plato was essentially a poet — the truth and splendour of his imagery, and the melody of his language, are the most intense that it is possible to conceive. He rejected the measure of the epic, dramatic, and lyrical forms, because he sought to kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action, and he forbore to invent any regular plan of rhythm which would include, under determinate forms, the varied pauses of his style. Cicero sought to imitate the cadence of his periods, but with little success. Lord Bacon was a poet.[1] His language has a sweet and majestic rhythm, which satisfies the sense, no less than the almost superhuman wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect; it is a strain which distends, and then bursts the circumference of the reader's mind, and pours itself forth together with it into the universal element with which it has perpetual sympathy. All the authors of revolutions in opinion are not only necessarily poets as they are inventors, nor even as their words unveil the permanent analogy of things by images which participate in the life of truth; but as their periods are harmonious and rhythmical, and contain in themselves the elements of verse; being the echo of the eternal music. Nor are those supreme poets, who have employed traditional forms of rhythm on account of the form and action of their subjects, less capable of perceiving and teaching the truth of things, than those who have omitted

[1] See the *Filum Labyrinthi*, and the *Essay on Death* particularly.

that form. Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton (to confine ourselves to modern writers) are philosophers of the very loftiest power.

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connection than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. The one is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur; the other is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature. Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and forever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains. Hence epitomes have been called the moths of just history; they eat out the poetry of it. A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful: poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.

The parts of a composition may be poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem. A single sentence may be considered as a whole, though it may be found in the midst of a series of unassimilated portions; a single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought. And thus all the great historians, Herodotus, Plutarch, Livy, were poets; and although the plan of these writers, especially that of Livy, restrained them from developing this faculty in its highest degree, they made copious and ample amends for their subjection by filling all the interstices of their subjects with living images.

Having determined what is poetry, and who are poets, let us proceed to estimate its effects upon society.

Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits on which it falls open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight. In the infancy of the world, neither poets themselves nor their auditors are fully aware of the excellence of poetry: for it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness; and it is reserved for future generations to contemplate and measure the mighty cause and effect in all the

strength and splendour of their union. Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fulness of his fame; the jury which sits in judgment upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers: it must be impanelled by Time from the selectest of the wise of many generations. A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why. The poems of Homer and his contemporaries were the delight of infant Greece; they were the elements of that social system which is the column upon which all succeeding civilization has reposed. Homer embodied the ideal perfection of his age in human character; nor can we doubt that those who read his verses were awakened to an ambition of becoming like to Achilles, Hector, and Ulysses: the truth and beauty of friendship, patriotism, and persevering devotion to an object, were unveiled to the depths in these immortal creations: the sentiments of the auditors must have been refined and enlarged by a sympathy with such great and lovely impersonations, until from admiring they imitated, and from imitation they identified themselves with the objects of their admiration. Nor let it be objected that these characters are remote from moral perfection, and that they can by no means be considered as edifying patterns for general imitation. Every epoch, under names more or less specious, has deified its peculiar errors; Revenge is the naked idol of the worship of a semi-barbarous age; and Self deceit is the veiled image of unknown evil, before which luxury and satiety lie prostrate. But a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as the temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty. An epic or dramatic personage is understood to wear them around his soul, as he may the ancient armour or the modern uniform around his body; whilst it is easy to conceive a dress more graceful than either. The beauty of the internal nature cannot be so far concealed by its accidental vesture but that the spirit of its form shall communicate itself to the very disguise, and indicate the shape it hides from the manner in which it is worn. A majestic form and graceful motions will express themselves through the most barbarous and tasteless costume. Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour; and it is doubtful

whether the alloy of costume, habit, etc., be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears.

The whole objection, however, of the immorality of poetry rests upon a misconception of the manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man. Ethical science arranges the elements which poetry has created, and propounds schemes and proposes examples of civil and domestic life: nor is it for want of admirable doctrines that men hate, and despise, and censure, and deceive, and subjugate one another. But poetry acts in another and diviner manner. It awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it coexists. The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb. A poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither. By this assumption of the inferior office of interpreting the effect, in which perhaps after all he might acquit himself but imperfectly, he would resign a glory in a participation in the cause. There was little danger that Homer, or any of the eternal poets, should have so far misunderstood themselves as to have abdicated this throne of their widest dominion. Those in whom the poetical faculty, though great,

is less intense, as Euripides, Lucan, Tasso, Spenser, have frequently affected a moral aim, and the effect of their poetry is diminished in exact proportion to the degree in which they compel us to advert to this purpose.

Homer and the cyclic poets were followed at a certain interval by the dramatic and lyrical poets of Athens, who flourished contemporaneously with all that is most perfect in the kindred expressions of the poetical faculty; architecture, painting, music, the dance, sculpture, philosophy, and we may add, the forms of civil life. For although the scheme of Athenian society was deformed by many imperfections which the poetry existing in chivalry and Christianity has erased from the habits and institutions of modern Europe; yet never at any other period has so much energy, beauty, and virtue been developed; never was blind strength and stubborn form so disciplined and rendered subject to the will of man, or that will less repugnant to the dictates of the beautiful and the true, as during the century which preceded the death of Socrates. Of no other epoch in the history of our species have we records and fragments stamped so visibly with the image of the divinity in man. But it is poetry alone, in form, in action, or in language, which has rendered this epoch memorable above all others, and the storehouse of examples to everlasting time. For written poetry existed at that epoch simultaneously with the other arts, and it is an idle inquiry to demand which gave and which received the light, which all, as from a common focus, have scattered over the darkest periods of succeeding time. We know no more of cause and effect than a constant conjunction of events: poetry is ever found to coexist with whatever other arts contribute to the happiness and perfection of man. I appeal to what has already been established to distinguish between the cause and the effect.

It was at the period here adverted to that the drama had its birth; and however a succeeding writer may have equalled or surpassed those few great specimens of the Athenian drama which have been preserved to us, it is indisputable that the art itself never was understood or practised according to the true philosophy of it, as at Athens. For the Athenians employed language, action, music, painting, the dance, and religious institutions to produce a common effect in the representation of the highest idealisms of passion and of power; each division in the art was made perfect in its kind by artists of the most consummate skill, and was disciplined into a beautiful proportion and unity one towards the

other. On the modern stage a few only of the elements capable of expressing the image of the poet's conception are employed at once. We have tragedy without music and dancing; and music and dancing without the highest impersonations of which they are the fit accompaniment, and both without religion and solemnity. Religious institution has indeed been usually banished from the stage. Our system of divesting the actor's face of a mask, on which the many expressions appropriate to his dramatic character might be moulded into one permanent and unchanging expression, is favourable only to a partial and inharmonious effect; it is fit for nothing but a monologue, where all the attention may be directed to some great master of ideal mimicry. The modern practice of blending comedy with tragedy, though liable to great abuse in point of practice, is undoubtedly an extension of the dramatic circle; but the comedy should be, as in *King Lear*, universal, ideal, and sublime. It is perhaps the intervention of this principle which determines the balance in favour of *King Lear* against the *Œdipus Tyrannus* or the *Agamemnon*, or, if you will, the trilogies with which they are connected; unless the intense power of the choral poetry, especially that of the latter, should be considered as restoring the equilibrium. *King Lear*, if it can sustain this comparison, may be judged to be the most perfect specimen of the dramatic art existing in the world; in spite of the narrow conditions to which the poet was subjected by the ignorance of the philosophy of the drama which has prevailed in modern Europe. Calderon, in his religious *Autos*, has attempted to fulfil some of the high conditions of dramatic representation neglected by Shakespeare; such as the establishing a relation between the drama and religion, and the accommodating them to music and dancing; but he omits the observation of conditions still more important, and more is lost than gained by the substitution of the rigidly-defined and ever-repeated idealisms of a distorted superstition for the living impersonations of the truth of human passion.

But I digress. — The connection of scenic exhibitions with the improvement or corruption of the manners of men has been universally recognized; in other words, the presence or absence of poetry in its most perfect and universal form has been found to be connected with good and evil in conduct or habit. The corruption which has been imputed to the drama as an effect, begins when the poetry employed in its constitution ends: I appeal to

the history of manners whether the periods of the growth of the one and the decline of the other have not corresponded with an exactness equal to any example of moral cause and effect.

The drama at Athens, or wheresoever else it may have approached to its perfection, ever coexisted with the moral and intellectual greatness of the age. The tragedies of the Athenian poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself, under a thin disguise of circumstance, stript of all but that ideal perfection and energy which every one feels to be the internal type of all that he loves, admires, and would become. The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived; the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror, and sorrow; and an exalted calm is prolonged from the satiety of this high exercise of them into the tumult of familiar life: even crime is disarmed of half its horror and all its contagion by being represented as the fatal consequence of the unfathomable agencies of nature; error is thus divested of its wilfulness; men can no longer cherish it as the creation of their choice. In a drama of the highest order there is little food for censure or hatred; it teaches rather self-knowledge and self-respect. Neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles. The drama, so long as it continues to express poetry, is as a prismatic and many-sided mirror, which collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them from the simplicity of these elementary forms, and touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and endows it with the power of propagating its like wherever it may fall.

But in periods of the decay of social life, the drama sympathizes with that decay. Tragedy becomes a cold imitation of the form of the great masterpieces of antiquity, divested of all harmonious accompaniment of the kindred arts; and often the very form misunderstood, or a weak attempt to teach certain doctrines, which the writer considers as moral truths; and which are usually no more than specious flatteries of some gross vice or weakness with which the author, in common with his auditors, are infected. Hence what has been called the classical and domestic drama. Addison's *Cato* is a specimen of the one; and would it were not superfluous to cite examples of the other! To such purposes poetry cannot be made subservient. Poetry is a sword of light-

ning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it. And thus we observe that all dramatic writings of this nature are unimaginative in a singular degree; they affect sentiment and passion, which, divested of imagination, are other names for caprice and appetite. The period in our own history of the grossest degradation of the drama is the reign of Charles II., when all forms in which poetry had been accustomed to be expressed became hymns to the triumph of kingly power over liberty and virtue. Milton stood alone illuminating an age unworthy of him. At such periods the calculating principle pervades all the forms of dramatic exhibition, and poetry ceases to be expressed upon them. Comedy loses its ideal universality: wit succeeds to humour; we laugh from self-complacency and triumph, instead of pleasure; malignity, sarcasm, and contempt succeed to sympathetic merriment; we hardly laugh, but we smile. Obscenity, which is ever blasphemy against the divine beauty in life, becomes, from the very veil which it assumes, more active if less disgusting: it is a monster for which the corruption of society forever brings forth new food, which it devours in secret.

The drama being that form under which a greater number of modes of expression of poetry are susceptible of being combined than any other, the connection of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form. And it is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence; and that the corruption or the extinction of the drama in a nation where it has once flourished, is a mark of a corruption of manners, and an extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life. But, as Machiavelli says of political institutions, that life may be preserved and renewed, if men should arise capable of bringing back the drama to its principles. And this is true with respect to poetry in its most extended sense: all language, institution and form, require not only to be produced, but to be sustained: the office and character of a poet participates in the divine nature as regards providence, no less than as regards creation.

Civil war, the spoils of Asia, and the fatal predominance, first of the Macedonian, and then of the Roman arms, were so many symbols of the extinction or suspension of the creative faculty in Greece. The bucolic writers, who found patronage under the lettered tyrants of Sicily and Egypt, were the latest representatives of its most glorious reign. Their poetry is intensely melo-

dious; like the odour of the tuberose, it overcomes and sickens the spirit with excess of sweetness; whilst the poetry of the preceding age was as a meadow-gale of June, which mingles the fragrance of all the flowers of the field, and adds a quickening and harmonizing spirit of its own which endows the sense with a power of sustaining its extreme delight. The bucolic and erotic delicacy in written poetry is correlative with that softness in statuary, music, and the kindred arts, and even in manners and institutions, which distinguished the epoch to which I now refer. Nor is it the poetical faculty itself, or any misapplication of it, to which this want of harmony is to be imputed. An equal sensibility to the influence of the senses and the affections is to be found in the writings of Homer and Sophocles: the former, especially, has clothed sensual and pathetic images with irresistible attractions. Their superiority over these succeeding writers consists in the presence of those thoughts which belong to the inner faculties of our nature, not in the absence of those which are connected with the external: their incomparable perfection consists in a harmony of the union of all. It is not what the erotic poets have, but what they have not, in which their imperfection consists. It is not inasmuch as they were poets, but inasmuch as they were not poets, that they can be considered with any plausibility as connected with the corruption of their age. Had that corruption availed so as to extinguish in them the sensibility to pleasure, passion, and natural scenery, which is imputed to them as an imperfection, the last triumph of evil would have been achieved. For the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure; and, therefore, it is corruption. It begins at the imagination and the intellect as at the core, and distributes itself thence as a paralyzing venom, through the affections into the very appetites, until all become a torpid mass in which hardly sense survives. At the approach of such a period, poetry ever addresses itself to those faculties which are the last to be destroyed, and its voice is heard, like the footsteps of Astræa, departing from the world. Poetry ever communicates all the pleasure which men are capable of receiving: it is ever still the light of life; the source of whatever of beautiful or generous or true can have place in an evil time. It will readily be confessed that those among the luxurious citizens of Syracuse and Alexandria, who were delighted with the poems of Theocritus, were less cold, cruel, and sensual than the remnant of their tribe.

But corruption must utterly have destroyed the fabric of human society before poetry can ever cease. The sacred links of that chain have never been entirely disjointed, which descending through the minds of many men is attached to those great minds, whence as from a magnet the invisible effluence is sent forth, which at once connects, animates, and sustains the life of all. It is the faculty which contains within itself the seeds at once of its own and of social renovation. And let us not circumscribe the effects of the bucolic and erotic poetry within the limits of the sensibility of those to whom it was addressed. They may have perceived the beauty of those immortal compositions, simply as fragments and isolated portions: those who are more finely organized, or, born in a happier age, may recognize them as episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the coöperating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world.

The same revolutions within a narrower sphere had place in ancient Rome; but the actions and forms of its social life never seem to have been perfectly saturated with the poetical element. The Romans appear to have considered the Greeks as the selectest treasuries of the selectest forms of manners and of nature, and to have abstained from creating in measured language, sculpture, music, or architecture anything which might bear a particular relation to their own condition, whilst it should bear a general one to the universal constitution of the world. But we judge from partial evidence, and we judge perhaps partially. Ennius, Varro, Pacuvius, and Accius, all great poets, have been lost. Lucretius is in the highest, and Virgil in a very high sense, a creator. The chosen delicacy of expressions of the latter are as a mist of light which conceal from us the intense and exceeding truth of his conceptions of nature. Livy is instinct with poetry. Yet Horace, Catullus, Ovid, and generally the other great writers of the Virgilian age, saw man and nature in the mirror of Greece. The institutions also, and the religion of Rome, were less poetical than those of Greece, as the shadow is less vivid than the substance. Hence poetry in Rome seemed to follow, rather than accompany, the perfection of political and domestic society. The true poetry of Rome lived in its institutions; for whatever of beautiful, true, and majestic they contained, could have sprung only from the faculty which creates the order in which they consist. The life of Camillus, the death of Regulus; the expectation of the senators, in their godlike state, of the victorious Gauls; the refusal of the

republic to make peace with Hannibal after the battle of Cannæ, were not the consequences of a refined calculation of the probable personal advantage to result from such a rhythm and order in the shows of life, to those who were at once the poets and the actors of these immortal dramas. The imagination, beholding the beauty of this order, created it out of itself according to its own idea; the consequence was empire, and the reward ever-living fame. These things are not the less poetry, *quia carent vate sacro*.[1] They are the episodes of that cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men. The Past, like an inspired rhapsodist, fills the theatre of everlasting generations with their harmony.

At length the ancient system of religion and manners had fulfilled the circle of its revolutions. And the world would have fallen into utter anarchy and darkness, but that there were found poets among the authors of the Christian and chivalric systems of manners and religion, who created forms of opinion and action never before conceived; which, copied into the imaginations of men, became as generals to the bewildered armies of their thoughts. It is foreign to the present purpose to touch upon the evil produced by these systems: except that we protest, on the ground of the principles already established, that no portion of it can be attributed to the poetry they contain.

It is probable that the poetry of Moses, Job, David, Solomon, and Isaiah had produced a great effect upon the mind of Jesus and his disciples. The scattered fragments preserved to us by the biographers of this extraordinary person are all instinct with the most vivid poetry. But his doctrines seem to have been quickly distorted. At a certain period after the prevalence of a system of opinions founded upon those promulgated by him, the three forms into which Plato had distributed the faculties of mind underwent a sort of apotheosis, and became the object of the worship of the civilized world. Here it is to be confessed that "Light seems to thicken,"

> "And the crow makes wing to the rooky wood,
> Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
> And night's black agents to their preys do rouse."

But mark how beautiful an order has sprung from the dust and blood of this fierce chaos! how the world, as from a resurrection,

[1] [Though they need the holy prophet to express them.]

balancing itself on the golden wings of knowledge and of hope, has reassumed its yet unwearied flight into the heaven of time. Listen to the music, unheard by outward ears, which is as a ceaseless and invisible wind, nourishing its everlasting course with strength and swiftness.

The poetry in the doctrines of Jesus Christ, and the mythology and institutions of the Celtic conquerors of the Roman empire, outlived the darkness and the convulsions connected with their growth and victory, and blended themselves in a new fabric of manners and opinion. It is an error to impute the ignorance of the dark ages to the Christian doctrines or the predominance of the Celtic nations. Whatever of evil their agencies may have contained sprang from the extinction of the poetical principle, connected with the progress of despotism and superstition. Men, from causes too intricate to be here discussed, had become insensible and selfish: their own will had become feeble, and yet they were its slaves, and thence the slaves of the will of others: lust, fear, avarice, cruelty, and fraud characterized a race amongst whom no one was to be found capable of *creating* in form, language, or institution. The moral anomalies of such a state of society are not justly to be charged upon any class of events immediately connected with them, and those events are most entitled to our approbation which could dissolve it most expeditiously. It is unfortunate for those who cannot distinguish words from thoughts, that many of these anomalies have been incorporated into our popular religion.

It was not until the eleventh century that the effects of the poetry of the Christian and chivalric systems began to manifest themselves. The principle of equality had been discovered and applied by Plato in his Republic, as the theoretical rule of the mode in which the materials of pleasure and of power produced by the common skill and labour of human beings ought to be distributed among them. The limitations of this rule were asserted by him to be determined only by the sensibility of each, or the utility to result to all. Plato, following the doctrines of Timæus and Pythagoras, taught also a moral and intellectual system of doctrine, comprehending at once the past, the present, and the future condition of man. Jesus Christ divulged the sacred and eternal truths contained in these views to mankind, and Christianity, in its abstract purity, became the exoteric expression of the esoteric doctrines of the poetry and wisdom of antiq-

uity. The incorporation of the Celtic nations with the exhausted population of the south, impressed upon it the figure of the poetry existing in their mythology and institutions. The result was a sum of the action and reaction of all the causes included in it; for it may be assumed as a maxim that no nation or religion can supersede any other without incorporating into itself a portion of that which it supersedes. The abolition of personal and domestic slavery, and the emancipation of women from a great part of the degrading restraints of antiquity, were among the consequences of these events.

The abolition of personal slavery is the basis of the highest political hope that it can enter into the mind of man to conceive. The freedom of women produced the poetry of sexual love. Love became a religion, the idols of whose worship were ever present. It was as if the statues of Apollo and the Muses had been endowed with life and motion, and had walked forth among their worshippers; so that earth became peopled by the inhabitants of a diviner world. The familiar appearance and proceedings of life became wonderful and heavenly, and a paradise was created as out of the wrecks of Eden. And as this creation itself is poetry, so its creators were poets; and language was the instrument of their art: *Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.*[1] The Provençal Trouveurs, or inventors, preceded Petrarch, whose verses are as spells, which unseal the inmost enchanted fountains of the delight which is in the grief of love. It is impossible to feel them without becoming a portion of that beauty which we contemplate: it were superfluous to explain how the gentleness and the elevation of mind connected with these sacred emotions can render men more amiable, more generous and wise, and lift them out of the dull vapours of the little world of self. Dante understood the secret things of love even more than Petrarch. His *Vita Nuova* is an inexhaustible fountain of purity of sentiment and language: it is the idealized history of that period, and those intervals of his life which were dedicated to love. His apotheosis of Beatrice in Paradise, and the gradations of his own love and her loveliness, by which as by steps he feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme Cause, is the most glorious imagination of modern poetry. The acutest critics have justly reversed the judgment of the vulgar, and the order of the great acts of the *Divine Drama*, in the measure of the admiration which they accord

[1] [Galeotto was the name of the book, and he who wrote it.]

to the Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. The latter is a perpetual hymn of everlasting love. Love, which found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients, has been celebrated by a chorus of the greatest writers of the renovated world; and the music has penetrated the caverns of society, and its echoes still drown the dissonance of arms and superstition. At successive intervals, Ariosto, Tasso, Shakespeare, Spenser, Calderon, Rousseau, and the great writers of our own age, have celebrated the dominion of love, planting, as it were, trophies in the human mind of that sublimest victory over sensuality and force. The true relation borne to each other by the sexes into which human kind is distributed has become less misunderstood; and if the error which confounded diversity with inequality of the powers of the two sexes has been partially recognized in the opinions and institutions of modern Europe, we owe this great benefit to the worship of which chivalry was the law, and poets the prophets.

The poetry of Dante may be considered as the bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modern and ancient world. The distorted notions of invisible things which Dante and his rival Milton have idealized are merely the mask and the mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised. It is a difficult question to determine how far they were conscious of the distinction which must have subsisted in their minds between their own creeds and that of the people. Dante at least appears to wish to mark the full extent of it by placing Rhipæus, whom Virgil calls *justissimus unus*,[1] in Paradise, and observing a most heretical caprice in his distribution of rewards and punishments. And Milton's poem contains within itself a philosophical refutation of that system, of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support. Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan as expressed in *Paradise Lost*. It is a mistake to suppose that he could ever have been intended for the popular personification of evil. Implacable hate, patient cunning, and a sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremest anguish on an enemy, these things are evil; and, although venial in a slave, are not to be forgiven in a tyrant; although redeemed by much that ennobles his defeat in one subdued, are marked by all that dishonours his conquest in the victor. Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which

[1] [A man most just.]

he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil. And this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius. He mingled, as it were, the elements of human nature as colours upon a single pallet, and arranged them in the composition of his great picture according to the laws of epic truth; that is, according to the laws of that principle by which a series of actions of the external universe and of intelligent and ethical beings is calculated to excite the sympathy of succeeding generations of mankind. The *Divina Commedia* and *Paradise Lost* have conferred upon modern mythology a systematic form; and when change and time shall have added one more superstition to the mass of those which have arisen and decayed upon the earth, commentators will be learnedly employed in elucidating the religion of ancestral Europe, only not utterly forgotten because it will have been stamped with the eternity of genius.

Homer was the first and Dante the second epic poet: that is, the second poet, the series of whose creations bore a defined and intelligible relation to the knowledge and sentiment and religion of the age in which he lived, and of the ages which followed it, developing itself in correspondence with their development. For Lucretius had limed the wings of his swift spirit in the dregs of the sensible world; and Virgil, with a modesty that ill became his genius, had affected the fame of an imitator, even whilst he created anew all that he copied; and none among the flock of mock-birds, though their notes were sweet, Apollonius Rhodius, Quintus Calaber, Nonnus, Lucan, Statius, or Claudian, have sought even to fulfil a single condition of epic truth. Milton was the third epic poet. For if the title of epic in its highest sense be refused to the *Æneid*, still less can it be conceded to the *Orlando Furioso*, the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, the *Lusiad*, or the *Fairy Queen*.

Dante and Milton were both deeply penetrated with the ancient religion of the civilized world; and its spirit exists in their poetry

probably in the same proportion as its forms survived in the unreformed worship of modern Europe. The one preceded and the other followed the Reformation at almost equal intervals. Dante was the first religious reformer, and Luther surpassed him rather in the rudeness and acrimony than in the boldness of his censures of papal usurpation. Dante was the first awakener of entranced Europe; he created a language, in itself music and persuasion, out of a chaos of inharmonious barbarisms. He was the congregator of those great spirits who presided over the resurrection of learning; the Lucifer of that starry flock which in the thirteenth century shone forth from republican Italy, as from a heaven, into the darkness of the benighted world. His very words are instinct with spirit; each is as a spark, a burning atom of inextinguishable thought; and many yet lie covered in the ashes of their birth, and pregnant with the lightning which has yet found no conductor. All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight.

The age immediately succeeding to that of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio was characterized by a revival of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Chaucer caught the sacred inspiration, and the superstructure of English literature is based upon the materials of Italian invention.

But let us not be betrayed from a defence into a critical history of poetry and its influence on society. Be it enough to have pointed out the effects of poets, in the large and true sense of the word, upon their own and all succeeding times.

But poets have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists on another plea. It is admitted that the exercise of the imagination is most delightful, but it is alleged that that of reason is more useful. Let us examine, as the grounds of this distinction, what is here meant by utility. Pleasure or good, in a general sense, is that which the consciousness of a sensitive and intelligent being seeks, and in which, when found, it acquiesces. There are two kinds of pleasure, one durable, uni-

versal, and permanent; the other transitory and particular. Utility may either express the means of producing the former or the latter. In the former sense, whatever strengthens and purifies the affections, enlarges the imagination, and adds spirit to sense, is useful. But a narrower meaning may be assigned to the word utility, confining it to express that which banishes the importunity of the wants of our animal nature, the surrounding men with security of life, the dispersing the grosser delusions of superstition, and the conciliating such a degree of mutual forbearance among men as may consist with the motives of personal advantage.

Undoubtedly the promoters of utility, in this limited sense, have their appointed office in society. They follow the footsteps of poets, and copy the sketches of their creations into the book of common life. They make space, and give time. Their exertions are of the highest value, so long as they confine their administration of the concerns of the inferior powers of our nature within the limits due to the superior ones. But whilst the sceptic destroys gross superstitions, let him spare to deface, as some of the French writers have defaced, the eternal truths charactered upon the imaginations of men. Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines labour, let them beware that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and want. They have exemplified the saying, "To him that hath, more shall be given; and from him that hath not, the little that he hath shall be taken away." The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of the state is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism. Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating faculty.

It is difficult to define pleasure in its highest sense; the definition involving a number of apparent paradoxes. For, from an inexplicable defect of harmony in the constitution of human nature, the pain of the inferior is frequently connected with the pleasures of the superior portions of our being. Sorrow, terror, anguish, despair itself, are often the chosen expressions of an approximation to the highest good. Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle; tragedy delights by affording a shadow of the pleasure which exists in pain. This is the source also of the

melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody. The pleasure that is in sorrow is sweeter than the pleasure of pleasure itself. And hence the saying, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of mirth." Not that this highest species of pleasure is necessarily linked with pain. The delight of love and friendship, the ecstasy of the admiration of nature, the joy of the perception, and still more of the creation of poetry, is often wholly unalloyed.

The production and assurance of pleasure in this highest sense is true utility. Those who produce and preserve this pleasure are poets or poetical philosophers.

The exertions of Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau,[1] and their disciples, in favour of oppressed and deluded humanity, are entitled to the gratitude of mankind. Yet it is easy to calculate the degree of moral and intellectual improvement which the world would have exhibited had they never lived. A little more nonsense would have been talked for a century or two; and perhaps a few more men, women, and children burnt as heretics. We might not at this moment have been congratulating each other on the abolition of the Inquisition in Spain. But it exceeds all imagination to conceive what would have been the moral condition of the world if neither Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Calderon, Lord Bacon, nor Milton had ever existed; if Raphael and Michael Angelo had never been born; if the Hebrew poetry had never been translated; if a revival of the study of Greek literature had never taken place; if no monuments of ancient sculpture had been handed down to us; and if the poetry of the religion of the ancient world had been extinguished together with its belief. The human mind could never, except by the intervention of these excitements, have been awakened to the invention of the grosser sciences, and that application of analytical reasoning to the aberrations of society, which it is now attempted to exalt over the direct expression of the inventive and creative faculty itself.

We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry in these systems of thought is concealed by the accumulation of facts and

[1] Although Rousseau has been thus classed, he was essentially a poet. The others, even Voltaire, were mere reasoners.

calculating processes. There is no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy, or, at least, what is wiser and better than what men now practise and endure. But we let "*I dare not* wait upon *I would*, like the poor cat in the adage." We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. To what but a cultivation of the mechanical arts in a degree disproportioned to the presence of the creative faculty, which is the basis of all knowledge, is to be attributed the abuse of all invention for abridging and combining labour, to the exasperation of the inequality of mankind? From what other cause has it arisen that the discoveries which should have lightened have added a weight to the curse imposed on Adam? Poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world.

The functions of the poetical faculty are twofold: by one it creates new materials of knowledge, and power, and pleasure; by the other it engenders in the mind a desire to reproduce and arrange them according to a certain rhythm and order which may be called the beautiful and the good. The cultivation of poetry is never more to be desired than at periods when, from an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life exceeds the quantity of the power of assimilating them to the internal laws of human nature. The body has then become too unwieldy for that which animates it.

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring, and that which adorns all; and that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life. It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of all things; it is as the odour and

the colour of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it, as the form and splendour of unfaded beauty to the secrets of anatomy and corruption. What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship — what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave — and what were our aspirations beyond it, if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar? Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poets of the present day whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and the delay recommended by critics can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connection of the spaces between their suggestions by the intermixture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself: for Milton conceived the *Paradise Lost* as a whole before he executed it in portions. We have his own authority also for the muse having "dictated" to him the "unpremeditated song." And let this be an answer to those who would allege the fifty-six various readings of the first line of the *Orlando Furioso*. Compositions so produced are to poetry what mosaic is to painting. This instinct and intuition of the poetical faculty is still more observable in the plastic and pictorial arts; a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist as a child in the mother's womb; and the very mind which directs the hands in formation is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process.

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the

happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is, as it were, the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only as on the wrinkled sands which paves it. These and corresponding conditions of being are experienced principally by those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire. The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship is essentially linked with such emotions; and whilst they last, self appears as what it is, an atom to a universe. Poets are not only subject to these experiences as spirits of the most refined organization, but they can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this ethereal world; a word, a trait in the representation of a scene or a passion will touch the enchanted chord, and reanimate, in those who have ever experienced these emotions, the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past. Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind, bearing sweet news of kindred joy to those with whom their sisters abide — abide, because there is no portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things. Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes: its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the spirit of its forms.

All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient.

> "The mind is in its own place, and of itself
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n."

But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. It justifies the bold and true words of Tasso: *Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta.*[1]

A poet, as he is the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue, and glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men. As to his glory, let time be challenged to declare whether the fame of any other institutor of human life be comparable to that of a poet. That he is the wisest, the happiest, and the best, inasmuch as he is a poet, is equally incontrovertible: the greatest poets have been men of the most spotless virtue, of the most consummate prudence, and, if we would look into the interior of their lives, the most fortunate of men: and the exceptions, as they regard those who possessed the poetic faculty in a high yet inferior degree, will be found on consideration to confine rather than destroy the rule. Let us for a moment stoop to the arbitration of popular breath, and usurping and uniting in our own persons the incompatible characters of accuser, witness, judge, and executioner, let us decide, without trial, testimony, or form, that certain motives of those who are "there sitting where we dare not soar," are reprehensible. Let us assume that Homer was a drunkard, that Virgil was a flatterer, that Horace was a coward, that Tasso was a madman, that Lord Bacon was a peculator, that Raphael was a libertine, that Spenser was a poet-laureate. It is inconsistent with

[1] [No one deserves the name of creator, except God and the Poet.]

this division of our subject to cite living poets, but posterity has done ample justice to the great names now referred to. Their errors have been weighed and found to have been dust in the balance; if their sins "were as scarlet, they are now white as snow"; they have been washed in the blood of the mediator and redeemer, Time. Observe in what a ludicrous chaos the imputations of real or fictitious crime have been confused in the contemporary calumnies against poetry and poets; consider how little is, as it appears — or appears, as it is; look to your own motives, and judge not, lest ye be judged.

Poetry, as has been said, differs in this respect from logic, that it is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind, and that its birth and recurrence have no necessary connection with the consciousness or will. It is presumptuous to determine that these are the necessary conditions of all mental causation, when mental effects are experienced unsusceptible of being referred to them. The frequent recurrence of the poetical power, it is obvious to suppose, may produce in the mind a habit of order and harmony correlative with its own nature and with its effects upon other minds. But in the intervals of inspiration, and they may be frequent without being durable, a poet becomes a man, and is abandoned to the sudden reflux of the influences under which others habitually live. But as he is more delicately organized than other men, and sensible to pain and pleasure, both his own and that of others, in a degree unknown to them, he will avoid the one and pursue the other with an ardour proportioned to this difference. And he renders himself obnoxious to calumny when he neglects to observe the circumstances under which these objects of universal pursuit and flight have disguised themselves in one another's garments.

But there is nothing necessarily evil in this error, and thus cruelty, envy, revenge, avarice, and the passions purely evil have never formed any portion of the popular imputations on the lives of poets.

I have thought it most favourable to the cause of truth to set down these remarks according to the order in which they were suggested to my mind by a consideration of the subject itself, instead of observing the formality of a polemical reply; but if the view which they contain be just, they will be found to involve a refutation of the arguers against poetry, so far at least as regards the first division of the subject. I can readily conjecture what

should have moved the gall of some learned and intelligent writers who quarrel with certain versifiers; I confess myself, like them, unwilling to be stunned by the Theseids of the hoarse Codri of the day. Bavius and Mævius undoubtedly are, as they ever were, insufferable persons. But it belongs to a philosophical critic to distinguish rather than confound.

The first part of these remarks has related to poetry in its elements and principles; and it has been shown, as well as the narrow limits assigned them would permit, that what is called poetry, in a restricted sense, has a common source with all other forms of order and of beauty, according to which the materials of human life are susceptible of being arranged, and which is poetry in an universal sense.

The second part will have for its object an application of these principles to the present state of the cultivation of poetry, and a defence of the attempt to idealize the modern forms of manners and opinions, and compel them into a subordination to the imaginative and creative faculty. For the literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever preceded or accompanied a great and free development of the national will, has arisen, as it were, from a new birth. In spite of the low-thoughted envy which would undervalue contemporary merit, our own will be a memorable age in intellectual achievements, and we live among such philosophers and poets as surpass beyond comparison any who have appeared since the last national struggle for civil and religious liberty. The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution is poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting men and nature. The persons in whom this power resides may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little apparent correspondence with that spirit of good of which they are the ministers. But even whilst they deny and abjure, they are yet compelled to serve, the power which is seated on the throne of their own soul. It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words. They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations; for it

is less their spirit than the spirit of the age. Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

NOTES

THE following notes and questions aim to aid the student in the analysis of the foregoing selections. No attempt is made to supply data of historical or explanatory sort other than may be needed in the understanding of what the writers are driving at. The material that a critic uses, his point of view, and the sanctions for his views or the positive demonstration of their truth are what, in the opinion of the editor, are of prime importance for the student to comprehend. In so extensive, varied, and, in the last analysis, so personal a thing as literary criticism, no notes and questions can hope to be exhaustive. Accordingly, in the following pages, only main points are indicated, and these in a suggestive rather than a dogmatic way. Countless other questions will occur to every student and teacher, but a careful study of what is here supplied should furnish a pretty comprehensive idea of the chief sources of interest in literary criticism, of the more typical methods that it employs, and the types of demonstration of which critical opinion is susceptible.

I. LESLIE STEPHEN

Stephen's account of the work which Swift did in behalf of Ireland is an example of what may be termed biographical criticism, the criticism, that is, which interprets a man's writings in relation to his life. More particularly, this chapter is (1) a statement of Swift's position immediately after his leaving England on the fall of the Tory ministry, (2) a view of the political situation in Ireland at that time, (3) a narrative of how Swift acted during the ensuing score of years with regard to that situation, and (4) the comments of the biographer on Swift's acts and writings. Of these items the first three are narration and exposition of known fact, and criticism enters only in so far as Stephen interprets these acts in one way or another. The fourth item is the strictly critical part of the chapter; the critical issue regards the value of Swift's work. The critical questions that Stephen raises have to do with (1) the justice of Swift's position, (2) the practical effectiveness of his writing, and (3) the general worthiness of his championship of the oppressed. These questions are economical, political, and ethical, rather than strictly literary, and the evidence in support of Stephen's judgment is from ethical and economic standards, historical events, and a comparison with Berkeley. Hence the conclusions are less personal and more susceptible of proof than would be the conclusions of an impressionistic method.

For that reason, the present essay is a good one from which to approach the study of criticism. The best way to begin such study is with pieces wherein the conclusions can be shown to be based on more or less tangible and acceptable evidence, rather than on predilection or personal impression. Much philological criticism (of necessity excluded from this volume) has this

same advantage — that its standards can be more exactly applied. The personal question does not so largely enter.

Other examples of criticism of the same biographical sort will be found in such volumes as the *English Men of Letters Series*, especially those on Pope and Johnson by the same author, the *Great Writers Series*, the *Beacon Biographies*, particularly Professor Carpenter's *Longfellow*, a nice instance of the method, the longer articles in the *Dictionary of National Biography* — and others. Good critical essays by Stephen — many of them of a philosophical rather than a biographical character — are those of *Hours in a Library* and *Studies of a Biographer*. For other lives of Swift, consult Scott, Forster, Craik, and Collins.

1. Analyze the selection with a view to showing the points which Stephen brings out. What parts are concerned with Swift's personality, character, and motives? What with the situation in which he found himself and the condition of Ireland? What conclusion does Stephen arrive at with regard to the value of Swift's work? Is the value of a literary, or of some other, kind? What is the evidence on which Stephen bases his conclusions?

2. Compare the chapter with that on *Gulliver's Travels* from the same book; do you note any differences in the kind of critical evidence or in the kind of values? Write a commentary on some portion of the work of an author's life.

II. DAVID MASSON

The review of De Quincey's writings is a good example of formal literary classification. Like any thorough classification, it (1) gives the basis or principle on which the divisions are made, (2) enumerates the individuals in the classes and sub-classes, and (3) illustrates each class by typical examples. It further attempts to bring out the variety and range of De Quincey's work and to show the relative significance and value of the different classes and of individual pieces. It will be noted that the basis of classification is mainly the ideas that are to be found in De Quincey's work, but other descriptive categories are also used. Some of these, according to the character of the work under discussion, are æsthetic, some have to do with the occasion of the work, some with structure, and some, as the description of *Plato's Republic*, with De Quincey's temperamental reactions. It will also be observed that the descriptions of some of the works, as *Klosterheim* and *The English Mail Coach*, are pretty full; these are good examples of descriptive summary. There is also a good deal of illustrative quotation.

So formal a classification as this is not very common in criticism, but classification of some sort may be said to be implied in any good literary discussion whatsoever. The account of Wood's Halfpence, the preceding selection, for example, is really a sub-class of all Swift's writings, embracing those in behalf of Ireland. Again, literary classification may be made on different bases. A "polyhistor" like De Quincey, whose works bear singularly little relation to the course of his life, may best be approached with reference to his ideas, but a classification on the basis of his manner would also be possible. The writings of a man like Swift, on the contrary, whose life was passed in practical activity and who contributed little to our stock of ideas, though much to our amusement, were better classed by the occasion; and such is the scheme adopted by Stephen in his life of Swift. A classification

of Swift's works into controversial articles, satires, etc., would also be possible. With Lamb, again, a classification largely by forms, into stories, dramas, criticism, and essays, etc., would be convenient and would have the additional aptness of following pretty closely the various successive interests of Lamb's literary development. An example of formal literary classification, not so thorough as Masson's, will be found in Nichol's *Carlyle* in the *English Men of Letters*.

1. Point out the parts of the present essay which (1) explain the principles of the classification used, (2) name the individuals, and (3) characterize the types and individuals. In what different ways does the critic characterize the work of the author? What does Masson say of the relative value of the different writings of De Quincey? What of De Quincey's claim to comparative greatness?

2. How many of these characterizations state fact, and what ones merely express opinion? Do you see any reason for Masson's opinion that De Quincey's biographical sketch of Shakespeare is "the perfection of proportion" (p. 18)? Does Masson demonstrate his opinion of De Quincey as a critic (p. 31)? What of the estimate of *Levana?*

3. Point out the principle and scheme of classification in other essays in this volume. Make a classification of the works of some writer with whom you are tolerably familiar, with a view to showing his range, variety, and chief points of excellence.

III. SAMUEL JOHNSON

Johnson's famous piece of criticism is an example of that kind which attempts to characterize the type or *genre* to which a man belongs. Cowley is treated as the representative of a class, a fashion, or a cast of mind. Johnson's exposition is excellent: he, following his usually systematic and simple intellectual methods, first characterizes his type and then illustrates it. The critical question at issue would, therefore, be how fairly Johnson has represented the men he is dealing with; how far, in short, his characterization is a matter of fact. His judgment concerning the passages quoted is presumably solid and authoritative; but more modern students differ with him in holding that he has not fairly represented the better side of Donne, Cowley, and others.

In recent years a good deal of heed has been paid to the study of form or *genre* in literature, on the principle that individual pieces of writing may properly be compared only with like kinds, but that the different *genres* — the epic, the lyric, the novel, etc. — have different degrees of value, and on the ground, too, that the proper study of literature can best proceed by process of isolating and tracing the origin and development of various forms. An important book of this type is the late F. Brunetière's *L'Évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature*, and various special books, such as Professor W. L. Cross's *The Development of the English Novel*, and Professor John Erskine's *Elizabethan Lyric*, are examples of the study.

1. What, according to Johnson, are the chief characteristics of the "metaphysical poets"? What is meant, in this essay, by "wit"? By "art"? By to "copy nature or life"? By "singular in their thoughts"? By "just"? By "conceits"? By "inelegant"? By the various figures of speech in the quotations? By such phrases, in the opening paragraph, as "Tracing intellectual pleasure to its natural sources in the mind of men," etc.?

2. In general, by what sanctions does Johnson seek to establish his positions, in this essay? What are his standards for critical judgment? Compare these with the evidence that he uses in others of *The Lives of the Poets*, in, for example, his famous characterization of Pope's personality, character, and attainment. Test the truth of such phrases as "Sublimity is produced by aggregation and littleness of dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness" (p. 47).

IV. THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

The present selection is an example of what is frequently called *destructive* criticism, in that it assails a received tradition and a current vogue. Macaulay's point is not so much to establish principles for guidance in criticism as to test a given product by certain standards. What these standards are may be gathered from the sins of which Montgomery has been guilty, as, for example, to mention the chief in order of appearance: stealing of other men's ideas, mutilation of them, the indiscriminate use of figures, stupidity, false syntax, lack of harmony, gross bad taste and even blasphemy, incoherence, lack of sense of situation, tautology, tasteless descriptions, the presentation of disjointed and silly physics, metaphysics, and theology, meaningless phrases, etc. The standards, it is evident, are of different kinds; some are merely rhetorical, others have to do with philosophy, religion, the writer's power of observation, and good use generally.

The critical issue of this essay, aside from the opening anathema against puffing, is with regard (1) to the specific fairness with which the points against Montgomery are made, and (2) granting their specific fairness, whether or not they are representative of Montgomery. It is the same question that came up regarding Johnson's discourse on the metaphysical poets. Another interesting point would be the actual effect of such a piece of criticism as the present.

The incomplete outlines given above of the topics treated in the essay reveals the fact that Macaulay approached his victim without much system. Structurally, the essay is a series of brilliant points, or examples, of diverse character, rather than a sustained thesis. Possibly this method of attack is better than a more formal one would be in dealing with so weak an opponent as Montgomery; the rapid-fire of Macaulay's style is very brisk and vigorous. Certainly there are few more lively and energetic pieces of criticism in the language than this.

1. Show in each detail what Macaulay's standards of judgment are. Can these be classified under one general head? If so, compare that general standard with those implied in the essays of Johnson, Arnold, Pater, and others. Compare the standards of Macaulay with those of other critics of the judicial type, as Johnson (*Lives of the Poets*) or Jeffrey. (See L. E. Gates's *Selections from Jeffrey*.) Compare the present essay with such essays as those of Mr. J. M. Robertson on Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle, Emerson, and others in *Modern Humanists*, to note any difference in standards.

2. Are the points made by Macaulay well taken? Are they of equal importance? Does he really prove that Montgomery was a plagiarist? Are these points representative of Montgomery? Is Montgomery assailed as a person or as a typically bad example?

3. Look into the history of the effect of this essay and see if you can determine why it may have accomplished its end, and why Jeffrey's equally vehement onslaughts on Wordsworth are looked upon as failures.

V. WALTER BAGEHOT

Bagehot's essay on Dickens's novels is an attempt to make one of those estimates of an author which is called a review, for the convenience and enlightenment of actual and prospective readers. This issue is stated clearly in the third paragraph. Admitting the greatness and the vogue of Dickens, Bagehot's aim is to classify Dickens's genius and to show the characteristic excellences and defects which emanate from it, and of which it is illustrative. This aim Bagehot carries out by his very broad division of men of genius into the regular and the irregular, with the accompanying illustrations of each type and the orderly analysis of Dickens's qualities which illustrate the type to which he belongs.

Throughout the essay Bagehot deals with these large opposing types, best illustrated by the fundamental dichotomy of "regular" and "irregular." His classification of novels into the "ubiquitous" and the "sentimental" is another case in point. The same trait is to be observed in other essays by the same hand: for example, in *Shakespeare The Man* (1853), Bagehot, by a series of contrasted general types — as the "experiencing mind" (illustrated by Shakespeare), the mind that grows by contact with new experience, and that which is, as it were, "cast" from the start — he arrives at a tolerably full characterization of the poet. It is obvious that the soundness of Bagehot's criticism must in a large measure depend on the common sense of these fundamental distinctions. They are not at all distinctions of impression, subtle phrasings — as with Pater, in the following essay — of the critic's own feeling for the object, but are so broad and obvious as to be as self-evident as axioms in mathematics. Some, of course, are pretty obvious. These distinctions are evidently the chief standard of judgment by which Bagehot measures his subjects, and they possess to a high degree the quality that is called "insight."

It is evident, also, that Bagehot here, as in other essays, like those of Hartley Coleridge, Bishop Butler, Wordsworth, and others, is interested in his subject chiefly as a type of mind or of art. In *Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; on Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in Poetry* (1864), for example, Bagehot cares for the poets primarily as illustrations of a type of art; Tennyson, say, represents the kind of writing which gains its effects from accumulation of details rather than by repression. The truth or falsity of such views can be ascertained by an examination of the data supplied by Tennyson's poetry. Only it must be remembered that Bagehot's distinctions are always broad, and might be unsound when applied to a few minute matters. Nor should it be forgotten that an entirely different set of data might strike another critic. The proof of the matter, then, besides being axiomatic, depends on the aptness of illustration, and that is of a very high order in Bagehot's work.

Types of critical writing which, like the present essay, attempt to place before the reader critical data for judgment are to be found in such essays (inferior to this in point of soundness of proof and material) as Arnold's *Wordsworth* (*Essays in Criticism, Second Series*), an attempt to show the causes which have kept that poet from his just due, and Mr. Morley's *Macau-*

lay (*Miscellanies*, Vol. I.), a preparatory lecture for the reading of Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*. A classic essay dealing with a broad distinction is Ruskin's chapter on the *Pathetic Fallacy* (*Modern Painters*, Vol. III.), or Arnold's distinction between the "grand style simple" and the "grand style severe" (*On Translating Homer*).

One cannot dismiss Bagehot without some mention of the brilliance and vigor of his style. Occasionally unorthodox in syntactic relation, it is probably unsurpassed by that of any English critic in happiness of phrasing. "He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity" is a case in point, as are his larger characterizations of novels (p. 88) and his analysis of the way Dickens saw things (pp. 90–94).

1. Point out the special question at issue in this essay. Show how the two types of genius are fundamental to the discussion which follows. Show in detail what topics Bagehot speaks of in the successive paragraphs.

2. Explain in detail the standards that Bagehot uses in characterizing Dickens. What standards are employed or implied in the comparison, for example, of unusual people, like Pickwick and Falstaff, with "real" people (pp. 96–97)? What is the standard in Bagehot's discussion of Dickens's politics (pp. 102–104) and his education (pp. 107–109)?

VI. WALTER PATER

The very graceful essay on Wordsworth belongs to that type of criticism broadly called appreciation — which attempts not so much to try an author by *a priori* reasoning as to state his valuable qualities. Pater's own definition of the term occurs in the preface to the *Renaissance* (p. xi): "The function of the æsthetic critic is to distinguish, analyze, and separate from its adjuncts the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is and under what condition it is experienced." Following this formula, Pater's aim is, therefore, to find the peculiar virtue of Wordsworth; the issue is expressed in the latter half of the fourth paragraph (p. 113). The essay then expounds the peculiar virtue of Wordsworth from several points of view — his character and material, his beliefs and philosophy, his manner, the constant trend of his thinking toward contemplation; and the essay ends with a short summary of his quality and value.

The essay is, broadly speaking, an impression of Wordsworth. It does not, however, confine itself to a statement of likes and dislikes, but rather deals with generalizations which Pater makes from facts which, from various points of view, he has observed of Wordsworth's best work. The sanctions for Pater's views are, therefore, observation of phenomena of spiritual import and, secondarily, the agreement which these views might have with other writers on the same subject, together with the response and agreement which the criticism might arouse in the mind of a reader. As information or fact, the essay is merely an exposition of what Pater himself saw and felt, and in this sense it merely carries out the sentence quoted in the introduction to this book: "What is important, then, is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects."

In thus making criticism simply a matter of sensuous perception, Pater is, within these limits, on wholly safe ground, and is "scientific" in so far as he expounds merely this fact that appears to him. Where it lacks completeness would be in its failure to take into consideration facts of vogue and agreement, and such rational tests as might be applied for the ascertaining of the "real" value of Wordsworth.

Criticism of this type abounds in Pater's work; indeed he is the best representative of this school in English. *Appreciations* and *The Renaissance* are the most valuable books for study. An interesting excursion into criticism can be made by comparing the point of view, the material, and the proof of several essays on Wordsworth (or any other notable writer); for example, those by Jeffrey on *The Excursion* and *The White Doe of Rhylstone*, Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*, Hazlitt in *The Spirit of the Age* and elsewhere, De Quincey in *Literary Reminiscences*, F. W. Robertson in *Lectures and Addresses*, Bagehot in *Literary Studies*, Vol. II., Lowell in *Prose Works*, Vol. IV., Arnold in *Essays in Criticism, Second Series*, Mr. Swinburne in *Miscellanies*, Mr. Morley in *Studies in Literature*, Stephen in *Hours in a Library*, Vol. II., Professor Woodberry in *Makers of Literature*, and others.

1. State the main classes of material that Pater uses in this essay. Show in detail what he brings out under each general head. To what degree does Pater deal with Wordsworth's personality, character, life, ideas, and manner?

2. What are Pater's standards of judgment? How does he demonstrate the truth of his propositions? To what extent is he in agreement with other writers on the subject? What are the main differences between his method and treatment and that of other critics of Wordsworth.

VII. JOHN MACKINNON ROBERTSON

The essay on Poe, says Mr. Robertson, in the preface to *New Essays towards a Critical Method*, is the only one in that volume which, perhaps, "comes near applying all the tests mentioned in the preliminary essay on *The Theory and Practice of Criticism* as proper to a critical inquiry." The gist of that excellent essay, with which all students of criticism should be familiar, is that in the formation of literary judgments all possible points of view and all the material furnished by an author should be considered, and that in this consideration all possible tests, literary, logical, argumentative, scientific, comparative, etc., should be employed. Discussion of these various points would occupy a larger space than may here be given.

For present purposes the essay on Poe is a new type of criticism. It may be called "scientific" in so far as it attempts to take a complete view of the facts and in so far as it attempts to establish facts by reasoning rather than predilection. In one sense, it may be called "collective," in that it states from time to time, as points of departure, enough opinions about Poe to arrive at some notion of the general consensus. It is historical in that it gives a good idea of the growth of Poe's reputation; though this part is incidental and not consecutive.

As "collective criticism" it is important to note that Mr. Robertson takes more completely into consideration than any other writer of this volume the facts of the vogue of his author and antecedent critical opinion. His citation of other critics is not, as with many writers, merely for the sake of a text

for his own views, but serves also as material for controversy and an attempt to arrive at the truth on demonstrable grounds. The critique is therefore more than a summary of historical facts or statement of vogue (things, indeed, too often neglected in criticism!), such as Professor Nichol's statement of Carlyle's influence (*Carlyle* in the *English Men of Letters*) or Mr. Sidney Lee's chapter on *Shakespeare's Posthumous Reputation* (*Life of Shakespeare*).

1. What points regarding Poe does Mr. Robertson cite as material for criticism? (Compare *Science in Criticism* in *Essays towards a Critical Method.*) What classification of material does he make? Compare the method and purpose of his classification with that of Professor Masson's classification of De Quincey's writings? What points are made in each of the separate sections? Make a summary of the essay.

2. What is Mr. Robertson's answer to the "theory of development" (p. 139)? Why is it "expedient" to follow Mr. Stedman, on p. 141, and not on p. 178? What are the canons by which Mr. Robertson criticises *The Raven*, *Lenore*, and *The Bells* (pp. 142–144)? What is Mr. Robertson's idea of "total performance" (p. 154)? of realism (pp. 157–159)? of Poe's type as a realistic prose writer (pp. 157–159)? of much contemporary criticism (*passim*)?

3. What sort of critical inquiry does Mr. Robertson employ at different points of his essay? On what grounds are his views demonstrable? How far do taste and liking enter into his conclusions? Answer these questions in detail.

4. Try to find other examples of "collective" criticism in books of essays and biographies.

VIII. JOHN DRYDEN

The celebrated *Preface to the Fables*, commonly regarded as one of the masterpieces of English criticism, appeared a few months before Dryden's death. This was prefixed to a volume of translations and adaptations, which bore the title *Fables, Ancient and Modern, translated into Verse from Homer, Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer: with Original Poems.* The *Preface* as it stands is chiefly a criticism of Chaucer, renowned for its catholicity of taste, but it contains also comparisons of the different poets named in the title, and a defence of his own conduct from charges made against him by Blackmore, Milbourn, and, particularly, Jeremy Collier, whose *Short View of the Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) had attacked the plays of Dryden, among others.

The *Preface* illustrates the general character of Dryden's criticism; like all his other pieces, it is occasional, and seems to indicate the things that he was interested in and the principles that he devised and employed. It is a very interesting study to trace the change in material and the critical principles which these prefaces show, and for this study Mr. W. P. Ker's *Essays of John Dryden* is a valuable book.

In this particular essay are to be noted the pleasure that Dryden evidently has in literature, his desire to show the letters of his country in the best light, his catholicity of temper, and the gentlemanly discursiveness of his style. The principles which he enunciates in passing are interesting: the favor of the reader, common-sense, and moderation, are evidently the chief court of appeal, but he also recognized ideas of growth in language and the necessity of moral standards. Once only, and then in a vague way (p. 198) he cites authority — that of Aristotle.

Dryden employs a method of comparison, balancing Homer and Virgil, Chaucer and Ovid, Chaucer and Boccaccio, Chaucer and Horace and Virgil. The material comprises facts of life, of personality, of time and place, of character, of learning, of style, of invention, of imagination, of structural design (which Dryden regards as very important in the determination of the result), of understanding of the subject, of verisimilitude, of dramatic naturalness and taste, of good sense and judgment, the "following of nature," of style and verse and harmony, and such things. Under some of these heads his facts are wrong, as in his attributing of *Piers Ploughman* to Chaucer, and his strictures on Chaucer's verse, and, in general, his knowledge does not, in all ways, correspond to our own (cf. Lounsbury's *Studies in Chaucer*, for a more modern view of the facts), but wherein he fails is because of deficient knowledge rather than by reason of unsound judgment on the evidence; in both knowledge and taste he was, as we are fond of thinking, far in advance of his age.

1. Make an analysis of the topics of Dryden's essay. Point out any other principles besides those enumerated that you have noticed, and also show the points of comparison on which the critical findings rest. What does Dryden say with regard to the relative value of these points of interest? What does he say of "conceits," and how sound are his reasons?

2. Compare the present essay with the *Epistle Dedicatory to the Rival Ladies* (1664, Ker, Vol. I., p. 1) with a view to showing the difference of material in each. With the preface to *Annus Mirabilis* (1666, Ker, Vol. I., p. 10). With the essay on *Heroic Plays* (1672, Ker, Vol. I., p. 148), and others. Compare it, in point of material, critical principles, appeal to authority, method of arriving at judgments, and form, with the celebrated *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 1668.

Compare Dryden from these points of view with preceding and succeeding critics, such as Sidney, Ben Jonson, Addison, and Samuel Johnson.

IX. FREDERIC HARRISON

The essay on Ruskin illustrates a not uncommon type of critical writing, in that it aims primarily to take neither a general survey of a man's work nor to present a theory of art, but to expound and estimate specific excellences. This purpose the author states in paragraph 2 (p. 202) and again in paragraph 8 (p. 204). It is carried out in two chief ways, after some discussion of the more general aspects of Ruskin's character and teaching: (1) by various adjectives characterizing Ruskin's prose and (2) by some analysis of the "consonance" of his sentences. There is also a division of a not uncommon type, especially in art criticism, into "earlier" and "later" manner, with some explanation of each.

Of neither of these points, the general characteristics and the "consonance," is Mr. Harrison's analysis very definite. With regard to the first, he uses with great frequency such categories as "precious," "grotesque," "noble," "eccentric," "obtrusively luscious," which are somewhat in the air, but with regard to the actual length of some of Ruskin's periods he is more exact, if not more luminous. The terms quoted evidently imply some standard of perfect prose, — like Arnold's phrase, "regularity, uniformity, precision, balance" (*The Study of Poetry*), — but what this standard is probably no critics agree. Indeed it is probably impossible of determination. Attempts have been

made to limit and define good English prose in an arbitrary, *a priori* way by saying that it should contain a fixed proportion of Latin words to Anglo-Saxon words, and some authors have found hope in the word-length of sentences; but these attempts merely supply more or less interesting and instructive data. Such data Mr. Harrison recognizes merely as illustrative of something extraordinary in Ruskin's periods. He also recognizes the patent fact of relativity in prose, or of types of style, as that of the preacher or the philosopher (p. 206).

The second point, that of "consonance," is one that has been more thoroughly studied, along with other things, in connection with verse rather than as an adjunct to prose. There are probably no such good analyses of prose as of verse, for example, Professor Gummere's *Handbook of Poetics*, or Professor Alden's *English Verse*. Mr. Harrison's remark that he knew no systematic study of the subject is undoubtedly true, but Stevenson's analysis of this element in *On Style in Literature* (cf. my *Representative Essays on the Theory of Style*) antedates this essay by ten years, and is also more thorough. (Cf. also my *Studies in Structure and Style* in relation to Ruskin.)

Mr. Harrison is wrong when he says (p. 215, n.) that Ruskin's sentence of 619 words is possibly "the most gigantic sentence in English prose." There is one in Hazlitt's sketch of Coleridge in *The Spirit of the Age* of 848 words, which, however, could, like most prize sentences, have been broken by slight changes of punctuation. It is so interesting in its effect and in its rhythm that it may be quoted: —

"Next, he was engaged with Hartley's tribes of mind, 'etherial braid, thought-woven,' — and he busied himself for a year or two with vibrations and vibratiuncles, and the great law of association that binds all things in mystic chain, and the doctrine of Necessity (the mild teacher of Charity) and the Millennium, anticipative of a life to come — and he plunged deep into the controversy on Matter and Spirit, and, as an escape from Dr. Priestly's Materialism, where he felt himself imprisoned by the logician's spell, like Ariel in the cloven pine-tree, he became suddenly enamoured of Bishop Berkeley's fairy-world,[1] and used in all companies to build the universe, like a brave poetical fiction, of fine words — and he was deep-read in Malebranche and in Cudworth's Intellectual System (a huge pile of learning, unwieldy, enormous) and in Lord Brook's hieroglyphic theories, and in Bishop Butler's Sermons, and in the Duchess of Newcastle's fantastic folios, and in Clarke and South and Tillotson, and all the fine thinkers and masculine reasoners of that age – and Leibnitz's *Pre-Established Harmony* reared its arch above his head, like the rainbow in the cloud, covenanting with the hopes of man — and then he fell plump, ten thousand fathoms down (but his wings saved him harmless) into the *hortus siccus* of Dissent, where he pared religion down to the standard of reason, and stripped faith of mystery, and preached Christ crucified and the Unity of the Godhead, and so dwelt for a while in the spirit

[1] Mr. Coleridge named his eldest son (the writer of some beautiful Sonnets) after Hartley, and the second after Berkeley. The third was called Derwent, after the river of that name. Nothing can be more characteristic of his mind than this circumstance. All his ideas indeed are like a river, flowing on forever, and still murmuring as it flows, discharging its waters and still replenished —

> 'And so by many winding nooks it strays,
> With willing sport to the wild ocean!'

with John Huss and Jerome of Prague and Socinus and old John Zisca, and ran through Neal's history of the Puritans and Calamy's Non-Conformists' Memorial, having like thoughts and passions with them — but then Spinoza became his God, and he took up the vast chain of being in his hand, and the round world became the centre and the soul of things in some shadowy sense, forlorn of meaning, and around him he beheld the living traces and the sky-pointing proportions of the mighty Pan — but poetry redeemed him from this spectral philosophy, and he bathed his heart in beauty, and gazed at the golden light of heaven, and drank of the spirit of the universe, and wandered at eve by fairy-stream or fountain,

> '— When he saw nought but beauty,
> When he heard the voice of that Almighty One
> In every breeze that blew or wave that murmured' —

and wedded with truth in Plato's shade, and in the writings of Proclus and Plotinus saw the ideas of things in the eternal mind, and unfolded all mysteries with the Schoolmen and fathomed the depths of Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas, and entered the third heaven with Jacob Behmen, and walked hand in hand with Swedenborg through the pavilions of the New Jerusalem, and sung his faith in the promise and in the word in his *Religious Musings* — and lowering himself from that dizzy height, poised himself on Milton's wings, and spread out his thoughts in charity with the glad prose of Jeremy Taylor, and wept over Bowles's Sonnets, and studied Cowper's blank verse, and betook himself to Thomson's Castle of Indolence, and sported with the wits of Charles the Second's days and of Queen Anne, and relished Swift's style and that of the John Bull (Arbuthnot's we mean, not Mr. Croker's), and dallied with the British Essayists and Novelists, and knew all qualities of more modern writers with a learned spirit, Johnson, and Goldsmith, and Junius, and Burke, and Godwin, and the Sorrows of Werter, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire, and Marivaux, and Crébillon, and thousands more — now 'laughed with Rabelais in his easy chair' or pointed to Hogarth, or afterwards dwelt on Claude's classic scenes, or spoke with rapture of Raphael, and compared the women at Rome to figures that had walked out of his pictures, or visited the Oratory of Pisa, and described the works of Giotto and Ghirlandaio and Massaccio, and gave the moral of the picture of the Triumph of Death, where the beggars and the wretched invoke his dreadful dart, but the rich and mighty of the earth quail and shrink before it; and in that land of siren sights and sounds, saw a dance of peasant girls, and was charmed with lutes and gondolas, — or wandered into Germany and lost himself in the labyrinths of the Hartz Forest and of the Kantean philosophy, and amongst the cabalistic names of Fichté and Schelling and Lessing, and God knows who — this was long after, but all the former while he had nerved his heart and filled his eyes with tears, as he hailed the rising orb of liberty, since quenched in darkness and in blood, and had kindled his affections at the blaze of the French Revolution, and sang for joy when the towers of the Bastile and the proud places of the insolent and the oppressor fell, and would have floated his bark, freighted with fondest fancies, across the Atlantic wave with Southey and others to seek for peace and freedom: —

> 'In Philarmonia's undivided dale!'

In general, Mr. Harrison's essay is somewhat loose in structure. As has been said, he states his point at issue a couple of times at least, frequently digresses from this to discuss Ruskin's ideas and his own likes and dislikes, and is obsessed with the length of Ruskin's sentences.

1. Point out the main topics of Mr. Harrison's essay and show what he is treating in each paragraph. What is the special topic, or critical issue, of his essay? Show how he brings this out and where he diverges from it.

2. Does Mr. Harrison use largely categories of demonstrable fact, or does he frequently deal with terms equivalent, in general, to "good" or "bad"? What, with regard to the preceding question, is implied in such a sentence as this (p. 211): "The piece is overwrought as well as unjust, with somewhat false emphasis, but how splendid in colour and majestic in language"? Or this (p. 219): "Every other faculty of a great master of speech, except reserve, husbanding of resources, and patience, he possesses in a measure most abundant — lucidity, purity, brilliance, elasticity, wit, fire, passion, imagination, majesty, with a mastery over all the melody of cadence that has no rival in the whole range of English literature"? Or this (p. 211): "Stained as usual with the original sin of Calvinism"? Or by the "perfect style" (p. 205)? Compare *On English Prose* in the same volume from which this essay is taken (or *Representative Essays on the Theory of Style*). Make a catalogue of the categories which Mr. Harrison employs, with a view to ascertaining his standards and the sanctions or proofs for them.

3. State Mr. Harrison's theory of "Consonance." Compare it with Stevenson's in *On Style in Literature*. Do you notice any defects in the theory? Test by this theory any passage that seems to you to be good.

4. Point out other English critics, such as Hazlitt, who have made large use of æsthetic categories in their criticism.

X. CHARLES LAMB

Lamb's famous essay on Shakespeare, perhaps his most conspicuous piece of criticism, is as good an example as can be found of that paradoxical type which rests on personality and a wholly *a priori* premise. That premise is expressed in these words: "They [Shakespeare's plays] being in themselves essentially so different from all others" (p. 228). Following from this, the critical proposition is: "I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage than those of almost any other dramatist whatever" (p. 222). This position Lamb maintains in a series of very brilliantly phrased reasons, of which that about Lear (p. 231) is classic in its eloquence and an excellent example of the dominance of taste in criticism.

The chief positions of the essay are these: (1) The inner life which Shakespeare represents is unfitted to the capacity of audiences which can appreciate only a story, action, or vociferous talk; (2) acting, even of a great sort, like that of Mrs. Siddons, tends to level, or to raise to the same level, both bad and good sentiments; (3) the tragedy of the mind, of Lear and Othello, for example, may not be represented except to the imagination; (4) stage mechanism is inadequate to picture the beauty of Shakespeare's scenes, as those of *The Tempest*.

It is evident that many fallacies are rampant in Lamb's argument. Historically, for example, it is a fact that the plays were, despite Lamb's interpre-

tation, written to be acted. Again Lamb confuses the distinction between good and bad acting. Furthermore, there is no reason why any play may not be acted, since we learn of tragic or spiritual happenings only by words and acts, media, that is, at the command of the actor, and it is doubtful, for psychological reasons, whether the reading of plays, which Lamb approves, may not be objected to on much the same grounds as the seeing of the stage presentation. Such phrases, too, as "I am not arguing that Hamlet should not be acted, but how much Hamlet is made another thing by being acted" (p. 224), contain fallacies; for that sentence implies an absolute Hamlet, which is impossible. Lamb's objection would apply to *any* interpretation or reading, and yet Lamb, with charming inconsistence, practically allows us to imagine any Hamlet we like; for he says (p. 222) that in seeing a Shakespearian play, "We have let go a dream, in quest of an unattainable substance." Other paradoxes will appear to the reader.

"The truth is," to use a phrase of Lamb's since widely employed by many impressionists, that Lamb's criticism is hardly more than the expression of his personal predilection, put in an eloquent form. The fundamental premise quoted in the first paragraph of this note is strictly undemonstrable. It is one of the curiosities of criticism, both historically and psychologically, to note how different this premise is from that which a century and more earlier assumed Shakespeare to be a barbarian. No more really rational grounds can be assigned for one than for the other; but the change in taste is extreme. It is a matter of curiosity, in like manner, to note the reasons which Lamb's great contemporaries, Coleridge, Hazlitt, De Quincey, and others, gave for holding a premise akin to that of Lamb. Shakespeare was to all these men, in the words of De Quincey, "the glory of the human intellect" (*Shakespeare*, 1838), yet the reasons why he was so great differ with their authors. His imaginative height is what strikes Lamb; with Coleridge, for example, it is some six or eight qualities of his mind (*Lectures on Shakespeare*), whereas De Quincey lays especial stress on what might be called Shakespeare's intellectual contribution. These dicta are, of course, quite as illuminating with regard to the personality of the authors as with regard to Shakespeare, and they very well illustrate the rôle played by temperament and predilection in criticism. They are really a very dignified expression of likes and dislikes. Their strength lies in the earnest and brilliant expression of the authors, and they may be regarded as literature rather than as science.

1. State Lamb's thesis and show the points that he makes in support of it. What is the demonstration or evidence for his various positions? What is meant by such phrases as "a proper reverence for Shakespeare"? (p. 229.)

2. Analyze such dicta as "The love-dialogues of Romeo and Juliet, those silver-sweet sounds of lovers' tongues by night; the more intimate sacred sweetness of nuptial colloquy between an Othello or a Posthumus with their married wives, all those delicacies which are so delightful in the reading — by the inherent fault of stage representation," etc. (p. 223), with a view to testing its universal soundness and to showing how much truth it contains. How does the passage containing the words "torn so inhumanly from its living place and principle of continuity in the play" (p. 222) square with Lamb's own procedure in his *Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets?*

3. Compare the thesis held by Lamb and his method with the theses and the method of contemporary paradoxical critics, such as Tolstoy in *What is Art?* or Mr. Bernard Shaw in the introductions to his various volumes of

plays, or Mr. G. K. Chesterton in *Varied Types*, *Heretics*, and his biographies of Browning and Dickens. What are the sanctions for the opinions held by these critics?

4. Trace the growth of critical tests regarding Shakespeare from the time of Dryden to Lamb, with a view to showing the steps by which the change took place. Ascertain the influence of Lamb's position on contemporary and subsequent criticism. These are very large topics, too large for most college students to handle. One should have recourse to Professor Saintsbury's *History of Criticism*, Professor Lounsbury's *The Text of Shakespeare*, and many other books, besides the periodicals of the time and the work of critics such as Johnson, Coleridge, and Hazlitt.

XI. HENRY JAMES

As is said in the opening paragraph, Mr. James's essay on *The Art of Fiction* is a discussion of the address of the same name by the late Sir Walter Besant, delivered at the Royal Institution, April 25, 1884. The present essay provoked a lively answer from Robert Louis Stevenson entitled *A Humble Remonstrance*, originally published in Longmans' *Magazine* (v. p. 139) and since reprinted in *Memories and Portraits*. The purport of Besant's address is to be gathered from Mr. James's pages; but it would be an illuminating study in criticism for the reader to examine the material, the point of view, and the sanctions of other essays and books on the subject. (See Gayley and Scott, *Introduction*, and my *Specimens of Narration* for more or less complete bibliography.)

The present discussion, as Mr. James is fond of reiterating, assumes the point of view of the producer. All that the latter is really obliged to do is to make his treatment of whatever subject he may choose an interesting one. He should be bound by no canons and by no rules, except the artistic obligation of getting the best possible execution for his material. Unlike Besant, Mr. James gives no directions for the writing of novels and no counsel to the reader for judging their worth, except such as are implied in such words as "treatment" and "interesting." The vagueness of these terms Mr. James admits when he says that no two readers will be interested in or impressed by the same thing. Thus it will be seen that Mr. James's criteria have nothing at all absolute in them; the treatment and the question of excellence is related, not to an ideal of novel writing, but to the material and the artistic impulse of the writer. In practically denying the ideal and the absolutely good, of which actual novels would be, as it were, more or less inexact replicas, he is, philosophically, quite at variance with the fundamental assumptions of the four essays on poetry which follow this.

Like these essays, Mr. James's work might be called *constructive* as opposed to *destructive* in that it tries to establish a principle for the understanding of an art. Mr. James would doubtless repudiate the term *constructive*, on the same grounds which make such terms as *romantic* and *the novel of character* appear to him to be clumsy and inexact, and he would strictly be right. No vigorous piece of destructive criticism such, for example, as Macaulay's essay on Montgomery, fails to imply some *constructive* principle; and, on the other hand, a piece of so-called constructive criticism by implication is damaging to works which do not accord with the principle which it is establishing. It is impossible, actually, with the same exactness which would

characterize a building contractor, to say in literature where destructiveness ends and constructiveness begins. However, the critical question here at issue regards the proof of Mr. James's skilfully wrought and brilliantly phrased exposition.

1. Explain the thesis of the essay. What sort of counsel has Besant offered to writers? What is Mr. James's answer to these points? What is meant in this essay by such terms as the "novel of incident," the "novel of character," the "romance," "the good novel and the bad novel," "life," "taste," "morality," "interesting," etc.? Why, of the novels cited, does Mr. James call some failures and some successes? What is Mr. James's test for a novel? Explain and test such sentences as "Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet" (p. 250).

2. On what grounds can Mr. James's position be supported or be overthrown? Are his views rational or are they personal? What light is afforded by the fact that the distinctions which Mr. James denies are actually in common use? Consult Bliss Perry: *A Study of Prose Fiction;* W. L. Cross: *The Development of the English Novel;* W. D. Howells's *Criticism and Fiction*, etc.

XII. EDGAR ALLAN POE

Poe's very brief exposition of the way in which he wrote *The Raven* is, whether strictly serious or not, an admirable piece of literary analysis. It is so clear that it needs little further comment, but one may remark that it is in general an exposition, first, of the theory of poetry and, next, of the application of the principles laid down to a particular situation. If Poe's premises are sound, — that a poem, depending as it does on conditions of limited duration, must be short in length, that beauty must be its object, that the most beautiful matter is the idea of death, etc., — then it would follow that *The Raven* must be the most beautiful poem in existence, unless possibly surpassed by poems of a like character and better execution. With this extreme judgment criticism would hardly be in accord, and the divergence would relate either to the theory or to its working out in metre, refrain, machinery, and the like. As a matter of fact, poetry has never been successfully defined to square with all theories; the essays of Arnold, Coleridge, and Shelley in this volume are based on other fundamental conceptions as difficult to demonstrate as this. Poe is consistent in his theory; it is the same as that enunciated in his well-known *Poetic Principle.*

1. State Poe's theory of poetry, showing what, in his view, are the characteristics of a poem. Show how these are applied in the composition of *The Raven.* What does he mean by "incident," "tone," "effect," "universality," etc.? Apply these principles to such poems as *Ulalume* and *Annabel Lee.* Do they apply to typical lyrics of Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, and others? On what proof do they rest?

2. What of the title of this essay as related to the matter under discussion?

XIII. MATTHEW ARNOLD

The structure of Arnold's essay, like that of Poe's, is clear and simple. The essay consists of two parts, a statement of the principles of procedure and the application of them to typical examples. The principles of procedure

are the recognition of poetry as a thing of supreme value and importance, the consequent necessity of holding fast to the best poetry, the avoidance of the fallacies of the historical estimate and the personal estimate, and the employment of touchstones as the best means of determining what real poetry is. If this theory is right and if it can be applied fairly, it is evident, as with Poe's essay, that Arnold's particular judgments must be sound. The main critical question at issue, then, regards Arnold's theory.

With regard to his theory, two facts are evident. Unlike Poe's idea of poetry, which was restricted to beauty, this is substantially restricted to moral values: poetry is the rounder-out of all human activities; it is "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge"; at its best it "will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can." Again there is, under this mainly moral view, the implication and assumption that there is a perfect "accent" or ideal of poetry which finds its nearest approximation in the quotations of the celebrated "touchstones." It is in the light of this ideal, of course, that these quoted passages become touchstones. The main question of the value of Arnold's essay, aside from its being merely an expression of personal opinion, would relate to the substantiation of this ideal, of these touchstones, and the minor questions would relate to the testing of particular poets according to them.

Whatever one's findings might be on such a question as this, when applied also to other essays of Arnold, — and on this point such critics as Mr. J. M. Robertson (*Modern Humanists*) and Mr. Swinburne (*Miscellanies*) have spoken in no uncertain terms, — there remains the historical question of the value of Arnold's criticism with regard to the awakening of interest in literature, to the increasing of our knowledge of foreign literature, to the eternally necessary plea for greater breadth and catholicity of judgment and taste. In these respects, at least, he is an important critic.

One thing has tended to obscure critical issues, of whatever sort, with Arnold. He is the master of a style of great order and lucidity, but of such pervasive assumption of superiority and finality of judgment that he either immensely attracts or very much repels readers, according to their temperament. His constant laying down of the law is very good for the sustaining of those who need the sustaining that the law supplies, but it sometimes annoys people who themselves prefer to enunciate the dogma, just as such severely final criticism finds little acceptance among people of an easier temperament. "*Moriemini in peccatis vestris*, — ye shall die in your sins," if you don't believe as I do about morals and style, is hardly fair as a final argument about disputed points.

1. What is the occasion of Arnold's essay? Make an analysis of the main points of this essay with a view to showing the text or thesis and the illustration.

2. What does Arnold mean by such phrases as "conceive of poetry worthily," "the high destinies of poetry," "a criticism of life." (Cf. the essay on Wordsworth in *Essays in Criticism: Second Series*), "the best," "the really excellent," a "real estimate," the "historical estimate," "the personal estimate," "high poetic truth and seriousness," a "classic" and "classical," "liquid" and "fluid," "accent," "the real Burns," "laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty," "the sound and unsound, or only half sound," "the true and untrue, or only half true"? What is implied in all these phrases with regard to Arnold's standards of criticism? What is implied in

such a sentence as this (p. 273): "To trace the labour, the attempts, the weaknesses, the failures of a genuine classic, to acquaint one's self with his time and his life and his historical relationships, is mere literary dilettantism unless it has that clear sense and deeper enjoyment for its end?"

3. What demonstration is there for the implied principles in the foregoing quotation, either in history, in common consent, or in ethical and artistic theory? To what degree can estimates be other than "personal"? How far do Arnold's seem to you to be personal? Consult his life, with a view to seeing how far his temperament and training influenced his judgments and was responsible for his taste. On what principle does he choose his tests and "touchstones"? In these tests does he recognize different *genres* of literature, or is it clear that the epic and dramatic *genres*, from which all his "touchstones" are taken, were to him the highest type? Compare his saying, with regard to Burns's bacchanalian poetry (p. 288): "There is something in it of bravado, something that makes us feel that we have not the man speaking to us in his real voice: something, therefore, poetically unsound." Do Arnold's quotations seem to be predominantly grave? Why are such grave subjects necessarily of the highest quality? Compare Poe on *The Philosophy of Composition*. Is the following a fair equation? "If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there" (p. 277) = If we immerse ourselves in one sort of poetry, we shall be immersed in it, and shall be impervious to poetry of a different kind. If not fair, why?

4. Test by your own impressions of Ward's *English Poets* the truth of Arnold's assertions in the paragraph beginning "The idea of tracing historic origins," etc. (p. 273). On the face of the lines quoted on p. 275, is it fair to say that "we are in another world"? Are the lines quoted from Dryden and Pope, on p. 286, fair examples of the work of those poets? Compare Arnold's use of illustrative quotation in *On Translating Homer*.

5. What should you say of the justness and value of many of Arnold's cautions, such as, against one's being too much engrossed in the understanding and analysis of machinery to get the more important ideas? Or this: "Moreover the very occupation with an author, and the business of exhibiting him, disposes us to affirm and amplify his importance" (p. 274)? In what respects does Arnold's criticism in this essay seem to you to be valuable? In what ways defective?

6. Analyze the body of Arnold's critical work with a view to showing the material, the principles, and the sanctions which he expounded. Compare it in these respects with previous and contemporary criticism.

XIV. SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

The *Biographia Literaria*, from which the present selection is taken, the *Lectures on Shakespeare* (1811), and the *Lectures on Literature and Literary Subjects* (1818) contain what is most valuable of Coleridge's critical ideas. In general, in these works Coleridge made an appeal to a body of phenomena and used a critical method much in advance of his more dogmatic contemporaries, such as Jeffrey. The main principles on which he based his criticism were (1) a theory of poetry, deduced, not from authority, but from philosophy and, what were to him, the facts of language, logic, and psychology

(as he understood these matters); (2) a consideration of the actual phenomena as represented in the current vogue of an author, a complete, rather than a partial, view of an author's production, the purpose of the author as stated or revealed in an interpretation of his work, and an analysis of the qualities of his style; and (3) a feeling for what is good in poetry — perhaps his ultimate test, and certainly a personal one.

The present selection well illustrates at least two of these principles. The desire to find a definition of poetry and to illustrate that definition by specific reference to Shakespeare's poems is habitual and characteristic of Coleridge's desire to find a satisfactory definition of poetry, not in verse, or in authority, or in history, but in terms of the innate nature of the medium. "Nothing," he says (p. 297), "can permanently please which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so; and not otherwise." In the illustrations from *Venus and Adonis* of the nature of poetical power, he deals, as it were, with the spiritual content of the poems as expressing itself in the sweetness of verse, the imagery, etc. The same method of criticism is to be observed in the famous enumeration of the characteristic defects and excellencies of Wordsworth (*Biographia Literaria*, XXII.) and the admirable qualities (there are no defects) of Shakespeare. Thus, again, using *Venus and Adonis* (Lectures of 1818; *Collected Works*, Vol. IV. pp. 46–50) as illustration, — this time of Shakespeare's consummate power as a poet, — he made him out to be possessed of the following characteristics: deep feeling and exquisite sense for beauty, entire command of his feelings, impersonality of expression, affectionate love for natural objects, fancy, "the indwelling power of the imagination," "endless activity of thought," and "a most profound, energetic, and philosophic mind." Evidently all these are spiritual categories; they are not, like De Quincey's catalogue of Shakespeare's values, matters of objective contribution, or, as in Poe, a matter of mechanically harmonious relation of parts to a subject of given beauty.

The other point is clearer. It has to do with the palpable fact of an author's vogue. In stating (p. 295) the fact of Wordsworth's popularity, Coleridge evidently makes use of an important, and too often neglected, sort of phenomena. (Cf. Bagehot on Dickens.) His subsequent criticism of Wordsworth is an attempt to find out why the fact should be so by reason of the nature of Wordsworth's poems.

It has been thought advisable to dwell at this length on the nature of Coleridge's criticism because his principles have become pervasive of much later criticism (cf. Mill: *Coleridge* in *Dissertations and Discussions*, Vol. II.). Compared with his contemporary Jeffrey, they indicate a wholly different tenor of mind and a far more enduring influence. They are alive to-day; whereas Jeffrey's method is usually sterile, brilliant though it be. Whether Coleridge borrowed his ideas or not need not be elaborated here (cf. J. M. Robertson: *Coleridge* in *New Essays toward a Critical Method*); we are simply dealing with the phenomena presented in his prose. Compared with his great predecessors he attached more importance to facts of the vogue and purpose of an author and to philosophy, analysis, and feeling. Thus there is with him greater relativity of treatment, a more flexible method, and, though he aimed at elaborate and ultimate truth, more impressionism.

The circumstances of the present selection so well explain themselves that little further comment is necessary. Wordsworth's important essay, which is the point of departure for Coleridge's criticism in this and the following

chapters of *Biographia Literaria*, was prefixed to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and should be read. It is to be had in any good edition of Wordsworth's complete works.

1. State Coleridge's fundamental idea of poetry, and show how this is borne out in the examination of *Venus and Adonis*. What are the "two cardinal points" of poetry according to Coleridge? Compare this idea of poetry with that of Poe, Arnold, and Shelley. What is the evidence in favor of it and of them?

2. Expound any critical principles or bases of judgment that you note in Coleridge's work.

XV. PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

The justly celebrated *Defence of Poetry* was originally written, as its title suggests, in a polemic vein, as an answer to Peacock's *The Four Ages of Poetry*. In its published form, much of the controversial matter was cast out, and only one or two indications remain of its controversial nature. The essay as it stands is among the most eloquent expositions that exist of the ideal nature and essential value of poetry. Its chief distinction lies in the sincerity and enthusiasm of the author.

Like several other essays in this volume, as those of Bagehot and Pater, it is based on one of those fundamental distinctions — here that between *reason* and *imagination* — which Coleridge so frequently expounded, and which here serves as a point of departure. There are two main parts: (1) the nature of poetry, as something connate with man, and poetical expression; and (2) the effect of poetry upon mankind. This latter part, though even more eloquent than the former, is more rambling. The critical question at issue in both is a very fundamental one, and is practically the same as that which has been debated for many years between two opposed schools of ethics and philosophy, the *intuitional* and the *utilitarian*, and is to-day rife betwixt *rationalists* and *pragmatists*. Of the truth of Shelley's main thesis there is occasion for much discussion, but of his own vigour and sincerity there can be no question.

1. State Shelley's thesis in this essay. Show in detail the topics which he treats. What is his criterion of the worth of various poets whom he mentions? What is his criterion for the determining good and bad poetry? What does he mean by such terms as "reason," "imagination," "taste," "the indestructible order," "universal," "wit and humour," "a story," "utility," "a single condition of epic truth," "the poet," "poetry" in its broad and in its restricted sense? What are the reasons for the superiority of poetry in its restricted sense over other forms of art? Why is *Lear* to be preferred to *Agamemnon* or *Œdipus Tyrannus?* Why were choruses in Greek drama of great poetical importance?

2. What are the sanctions for Shelley's view of the idea and value of poetry? How is his generalization supported?

3. Compare Shelley's idea of poetry, his method and his proofs, with those of Poe, Arnold, and Coleridge.

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